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THE

WORKS

OF THE

REV. P. DODDRIDGE, D. D.

IN TEN VOLUMES.

VOLUME II.

CONTAINING,

I. SERMONS ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

II. SERMONS TO YOUNG PERSONS.

III. SERMONS ON THE POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST.

IV. SERMONS ON REGENERATION.

V. SERMONS ON THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH.

VI. SERMON ON CHRIST'S INVITATION TO THIRSTY SOULS.

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CONTENTS OF VOLUME II.

PAGE.

DEDICATION vii
Preface ix

SERMONS ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

SERMON I. On the Way in which they should be trained up . . 11
II. Arguments to enforce the Duty 27
III. Advice to Parents 40
IV. An Address to different Relations, &c. 59

SERMONS TO YOUNG PERSONS.

SERMON I. The Importance of the Rising Generation 81
II. Christ formed in the Soul, the only Foundation of Hope for Eternity 100
III. A Dissuasive from keeping bad Company . . . 119
IV. The Young Christian invited to Communion . . . 137
V. The Orphan's Hope 156
VI. The Reflections of a Pious Parent, &c. 173
VII. Youth reminded of Judgment 189

SERMONS ON THE POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST, AND ON THE EVIDENCES OF HIS GLORIOUS GOSPEL.

Dedication to Young Persons 211
SERMON I. The Ability of Christ to save to the uttermost . . . 213
II. Proofs of his Ability to Save 228
III. His Power argued from his Intercession 242
IV. Coming to God by Christ, the Character of those that shall be saved 257
V. An Exhortation to Sinners to come unto God by Christ 270
VI. The Tenderness of Christ to the Lambs of his Flock . . 283
VII. Proofs of Christ's Tenderness, and the Improvement we should make of it 294
VIII. The Evidences of Christianity briefly stated, and the New Testament proved to be Genuine 311
IX. The Evidences of Christianity, deduced from the New Testament, allowed to be Genuine 332
X. Additional Evidences of Christianity, and Reflections on the whole 349

SERMONS ON REGENERATION.

	PAGE.
Preface	371
Postscript	375
SERMON I. On the Character of the Unregenerate	381
II. On the Nature of Regeneration, and particularly of the Change it produces in Men's Apprehensions	396
III. On the Nature of Regeneration, with respect to the Change it produces in Men's Affections, Resolutions, Labours, Enjoyments and Hopes	411
IV. The Necessity of Regeneration argued, from the immutable Constitution of God	429
V. On the Incapacity of an Unregenerate Person for relishing the Enjoyments of the Heavenly World	448
VI. Of the Importance of entering into the Kingdom of Heaven	464
VII. Of the Necessity of the Divine Influences to produce Regeneration in the Soul	481
VIII. Of the various Methods of the Divine Operation in the Production of this saving Change	499
IX. Directions to Awakened Sinners	522
X. An Address to the Regenerate, founded on the preceding Discourses	536

THE SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH.

Dedication	553
SERMON I. On Salvation by Grace	555
II. Faith the Gift of God	570

CHRIST's INVITATION TO THIRSTY SOULS.

Dedication	587
SERMON	591

SERMONS

ON THE

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

OF

CHILDREN,

PREACHED AT

NORTHAMPTON.

QUOD ENIM MUNUS REIPUBLICÆ AFFERRE MAJUS MELIUSVE POSSUMUS, QUAM SI DOCEMUS ATQUE ERUDIMUS JUVENTUTEM? HIS PRÆSERTIM MORIBUS ATQUE TEMPORIBUS, &c.

CICERO DE DIV. LIB. II. CAP. I.

PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

TO THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST, IN NORTHAMPTON,

UNDER MY MINISTERIAL CARE.

MY DEAR FRIENDS!

AS I reckon the providence which fixed me with you, in the pastoral relation, amongst the most singular blessings of my life; I would always retain a sense of those engagements which it brings me under, to labour to the utmost for your spiritual improvement. And through the divine goodness, I find it a delightful work; as your candid and serious temper adds a freedom and pleasure, both to my public ministrations, and private converses with you.

I take this opportunity of renewing the assurances I have often given you, that I could gladly converse with you more frequently at home; did not the other work, in which I am engaged, as a tutor, demand so large a share of my time. I heartily thank you, that you so kindly consider it, and make all the allowances for it I could reasonably desire.

I trust, God is my witness, that it is a sincere concern for his glory, and the interest of a Redeemer in the rising age, that has determined me to undertake the additional labour of such an employment: And as you voluntarily chose to sacrifice something of your private satisfaction, to these great and important views, I hope you will have the pleasure to see them answered, and that you yourselves will not, on the whole, be losers by them. You know, it is my desire, that as my pupils advance in the course of their preparatory studies, they would endeavour by their religious visits, conversation and prayer, to supply in part, that lack of service to you, which my care for them must necessarily occasion; and it is as a farther supply of it, that I now offer you those Sermons on the Religous Education of Children, which you heard from the pulpit some months ago.

The indulgence and thankfulness with which you then received them, is one instance, amongst many others, of your relish for plain and practical preaching. When some of you expressed your desire that they might be made more public, I confess I knew not well how to deny you; and I was the more willing to comply with your request, because it is a subject which cannot be often handled, so largely, in the course of preaching.

That tender concern for you and yours, which led me to treat of education, engaged me also to manage it in such a manner, as I apprehended might be most for your advantage and for theirs; that is, to make it, as far as I could, a warm and serious address to you. I have likewise, for the same reason, retained that form in transcribing them for the press; though I am sensible it might have appeared more fashionable and polite, to have cast them into a different mould, and to have proposed my remarks in a more cool and general way.

It is indeed my deliberate judgment, that there is an important difference between popular discourses and philosophical essays. The more I converse with the most celebrated speakers of antiquity, the more I am confirmed in that thought; and I will take the liberty to add, that, for the sake of common christians, I could wish it were more generally considered. But whether in this respect I am in the right or the wrong, I must say with the apostle to the CORINTHIANS, *Brethren, it is for your sakes.*

I would not willingly disgust persons of elevated genius and refined education; but I must confess, the great labour of my life is to bring down my discourses to common apprehensions, and to impress the consciences of men by them in subserviency to the momentous design of their eternal salvation. And as I am your shepherd, and you in a peculiar manner the people of my care, whom God has committed to my hand, and of whom he will require an account from me, I would always cherish a peculiar concern for you; and desire that, whenever I appear amongst you, my heart may overflow with a kind of parental tenderness for you. There are, perhaps, some traces of this in these discourses, which a severe critic may censure, and a profane wit may deride; nevertheless I have a cheerful hope, that they will be accepted by God, and approved by you. If divine grace render them useful to others, I would own it as an additional favour; and that they might be so, I have diligently avoided whatever might offend any serious reader: yet they are yours by a peculiar claim. For you I composed them; for you I published them; and to you I now present them; humbly commending them and you to the blessing of God, and entreating your continued prayers, that it may attend all the labours of

Your very affectionate Brother,
and obliged Servant,
In our common Lord,
P. DODDRIDGE.

Newington, July 14, 1732.

ADVERTISEMENT.

I HOPE the reader will pardon me, that I trouble him with the mention of two things, which, for some obvious reasons, I thought it not proper to omit.

The one is, that as my very worthy and condescending friend, Dr. Watts, had promised the world an Essay on Education, I would not have published these papers, without his full approbation of the design, as no way injurious to his; and I have omitted some particulars I might have mentioned, that I might interfere with him as little as possible.

The other is, that when I came to look over Dr. Tillotson's Sermons, and some other treatises on this Subject, I found many of the thoughts I had before inserted in my plan. They seemed so obvious to every considerate person, that I did not think myself obliged to mention them as quotations. What I have expressly taken from others, I have cited as theirs in the margin; and if I have been obliged to any for other thoughts or expressions, which is very possible, though I do not particularly remember it, I hope this general acknowledgment may suffice.

THE

RECOMMENDATORY PREFACE.

THE subject of the following Discourses is of high importance to the interest of religion, and justly claims a share in our labours, if we would *fulfil the ministry we have received* in the Lord, and give a good account of it another day. This led the author to insist upon it, in the congregation under his care. What was delivered from the pulpit met with a favourable reception, and many who heard these Sermons, have importunately desired they might be published, for the benefit of others. I have perused them with some attention, and such special satisfaction, that I heartily concur in the same request.

The neglect of the rising generation, which so generally prevails, ought, surely, to awaken our serious concern for it; and I persuade myself, that the present attempt will be welcome to all who are duly impressed with that concern; for so far as I am capable of judging, it is well adapted to answer its intended purposes. The method is natural and easy, the language correct, the reasoning strong, the address pathetic and convincing; and the whole is so agreeably adjusted, that I can with pleasure recommend it as a valuable and useful performance.

The peculiarities of the christian scheme are frequently and pertinently interspersed, through the several parts of this work; which will be acceptable to them, who *have tasted that the Lord is gracious.* I look upon these as the brightest ornaments of practical discourses; and when they are introduced in this view, it must evidently appear, that the principles of our holy religion, are not merely refined speculations for the entertainment of curious and inquisitive minds, but doctrines according to godliness, and the great support of virtue and goodness in the world. When arguments are drawn from the glorious dispensation of the grace of God, to persuade us *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly;* such endearing motives represent duty in its most amiable light, and have a most direct tendency to engage our cheerful compliance. It deserves our serious consideration, whether this be not a proper method to prevent the growth of infidelity; if not to reclaim those, whose arguments against the sacred scriptures are mere banter and ridicule, and who are gone so far as to glory in their contempt of the gospel, yet, at least, to prevent the spreading of that dangerous infection.

It has been justly observed by an excellent person*, whose practical writings meet with that general acceptance which they so justly deserve, "That when men have heard the sermons of their ministers, for many years together and find little of Christ in them, they have taken it into their heads,

* Dr. Watts.

that they may go safe to heaven without christianity." And this I apprehend will ever be the consequence, if we so lay the whole stress of our moral obligations, on the reason and fitness of things, as to neglect that Saviour *who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* When christian preachers seldom mention redemption and salvation by the Son of God, unless it be to expose an absurd sense, which some have put upon those doctrines; and thereby more artfully slur them, than by a direct and open attack; they cannot expect their hearers should have any great regard for them. Their people will be insensibly led into this conclusion, that they have little concernment with any thing in the New Testament but the morality of it, and that the other parts of the gospel may be neglected, without hazard to their souls. And when they have advanced thus far, the next step will be, to set the inspired writings on a level with heathen authors, whose moral sentiments are admired, though there are many poetical fictions and fabulous stories intermixed with them.

The apostles took a different method, and constantly supported their instructions, by considerations peculiar to the gospel of Christ. And if our schemes in religion will not permit us to follow their example, and we feel a secret unwillingness to form ourselves on their model, lest our discourses should not be polite and rational, we have reason to fear, we are declining from that *faith* which they *once delivered to the saints.* But if we copy after these *wise master-builders,* we may hope *the hand of the Lord will be with us;* and that we shall see something of that divine success attending our labours, which so remarkably accompanied theirs, when *many believed and turned unto the Lord.* And they, who have experienced the powerful influences of the gospel, in forming their hearts and lives for God, will *be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight and craftiness of men,* nor easily prevailed upon to part with it. And I am confirmed in this opinion, by observing that deism makes little progress in those auditories, where the distinguishing doctrines of christianity are frequently and judiciously considered.

For this reason, I would humbly propose the following composures to the imitation of younger ministers. And I cannot but indulge a reasonable expectation, that those who are forming for the service of the sanctuary under the instructions of the learned and worthy author, having so good a pattern daily before them, will appear in our assemblies with a fixed resolution to exalt a Redeemer in all their ministrations; that they will stand as *pillars in the temple of our God,* and be the ornaments and supports of the christian cause, when their fathers shall sleep in the dust.

As the subject of these sermons is no matter of controversy, but plain and important duty, one would hope, they will not fall under the severe censure of any. At least, I am fully persuaded, that humble and serious christians, whose chief concern is to know, and do their duty, will find agreeable entertainment, and much profitable instruction, in the perusal of them.

DAVID SOME.

PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

SERMONS

ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

SERMON I.

On the Way in which they should be trained up.

Prov. xxii. 6.——*Train up a Child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

IT is a most amiable and instructive part of the character which Isaiah draws of *The great Shepherd* of the church, that he should *gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom**: A representation abundantly answered by the tender care which our Redeemer expressed for the weakest of his disciples; and beautifully illustrated by the endearing condescension, with which he embraced and blessed little infants. Nor is it foreign to the present purpose to observe, that when he recommends to Peter the care of his flock, as the most important and acceptable evidence of his sincere affection to his person, he varies the phrase; in one place saying, *feed my sheep*, and in the other, *feed my lambs*†. Perhaps it might be in part intended to intimate, that the care of a gospel-minister, who would in the most agreeable manner approve his love to his master, should extend itself to the rising generation, as well as those of a maturer age, and more considerable standing in the church. It is in obedience to his authority, and from a regard to his interest, that I am now entering on the work of catechising, which I shall introduce with some practical discourses on the education of children, the subject which is now before us.

I persuade myself, that you, my friends, will not be displeased to hear, that I intend to handle it at large, and to make it the employment of more than a single Sabbath. A little reflection may convince you, that I could hardly offer any thing to your consideration of greater importance; and that, humanly speaking, there is nothing in which the comfort of families, the prosperity of nations, the salvation of souls, the interest of a Redeemer, and the glory of God, is more apparently and intimately concerned.

* Isai. xl. 11. † John xxi. 15, 16.

I very readily allow, that no human endeavours, either of ministers or parents, can ever be effectual to bring one soul to the saving knowledge of God in Christ, without the co-operating and transforming influences of the blessed Spirit: Yet you well know, and I hope you seriously consider, that this does not in the least weaken our obligation to the most diligent use of proper means. The great God hath stated rules of operation in the world of grace, as well as of nature; and though he is not limited to them, it is arrogant, and may be destructive, to expect that he should deviate from them in favour of us or ours.

We *live not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God**; and were he determined to continue your lives, or the lives of your children, he could no doubt feed or support you by miracle: Yet you think yourselves obliged to a prudent care for your *daily bread*, and justly conclude, that were you to neglect to administer it to your infant offspring, you would be chargeable with their murder before God and man; nor could you think of pleading it as any excuse, that you referred them to a miraculous divine care, whilst you left them destitute of any human supplies. Such a plea would only add impiety to cruelty, and greatly aggravate the crime it attempted to palliate. As absurd would it be for us to flatter ourselves with a hope that our children should be *Taught of God*, and regenerated and sanctified by the influences of his grace, if we neglect that prudent and religious care in their education, which it is my business this day to describe and recommend, and which Solomon urges in the words of my text: *Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

I need not offer you many critical remarks on so plain and intelligible a passage. You will easily observe, that it consists of an important advice, addressed to the parents and governors of children, *Train up a child in the way he should go;* and also of a weighty reason by which it is inforced; *and when he is old he will not depart from it.* The general sense is undoubtedly retained in our translation, as it commonly is; but here, as in many other places, something of the original energy and beauty is lost.

The Hebrew word†, which we render *train up*, does some-

* Mat. iv. 4.

† חנך imbuere, prima rudimenta dare, erudire, docere, dedicare. Pagn. initiare. Cocc. The LXX. render it, with an exactness which our language will not admit, by Εγκαινιζειν. It is used also of those attendants of Abraham, who in the text are called his *trained*, and in our margin, his *instructed* Servants; Gen. xiv. 14.

times signify, in the general, to initiate into some science or discipline; and, very frequently, to apply any new thing to the use for which it was intended*. It is especially used of sacred things, which were solemnly dedicated, or set apart to the service of God†: And perhaps it may here be intended to intimate that due care is to be taken in the education of children, from a principle of religion, as well as of prudence and humanity; and that our instructions should lead them to the knowledge of God, and be adapted to form them for his service, as well as to engage them to personal and social virtue.

It is added, that a child should be *Trained up in the way in which he should go*‡; which seems to be more exactly rendered by others, *at the entrance* or *from the beginning of his way*, to express the early care which ought to be taken to prevent the prevalency of irregular habits, by endeavouring from the first dawning of reason to direct it aright, and to infuse into the tender unpractised mind, the important maxims of wisdom and goodness.

To encourage us to this care, the wise man assures us, that we may reasonably expect the most happy consequence from it: That if the young traveller be thus directed to set out well in the journey of life, there is a fair prospect that he will go on to its most distant stages, with increasing honour and happiness. *Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

I shall endeavour to illustrate and enforce this important advice in the following method, which appears to me the most natural, and for that reason the most eligible:

I. I shall more particularly mark out the way in which children are to be trained up.

II. Offer some plain and serious considerations to awaken you to this pious and necessary care.

i. e. probably, formed to military discipline, though religious instruction is not to be excluded. Gen. xviii. 19.—חנך, a word derived from the same root, in the rabbinical writings signifies *a catechism*; and therefore the margin of our text reads *catechise a child, &c.*

* Thus it is applied to any *new built house*, Deut. xx. 5. to that of David, Psal. xxx. tit. and to *the wall of Jerusalem*, Neh. xii. 27.

† Thus it is applied to the *dedication of the altar*, Numb. vii. 10, 11, 84, 88. 2 Chron. vii. 9. and to that of *the temple*, 1 Kings viii. 63. 2 Chron. vii. 5.

‡ על פי דרכו, which the French version renders "a l' Entree de son train:" Yet I am sensible פי when used with על is sometimes an expletive, as Gen. xliii. 7, Numb. xxvi. 56. and the learned Glassius, as well as our translators, thought the text another instance of it. Glass. Phil. Sac. p. 482.

III. Direct to the manner in which the attempt is to be made, and the precautions which are to be used in order to render it effectual. And then,

IV. I will conclude the whole with a more particular application, suited to your different characters, relations, and circumstances of life.

I am very sensible, that it is a very delicate as well as important subject, which is now before me; I have therefore thought myself obliged more attentively to weigh what has occurred to my own meditations, more diligently to consult the sentiments of others, and above all, more earnestly to seek those divine influences, without which, I know, I am unequal to the easiest task; but in dependence on which, I cheerfully attempt one of the most difficult. The result of the whole I humbly offer to your candid examination; not pretending at any time to dictate in an authoritative manner, and least of all on such an occasion as this; but rather *speaking as to wise men*, who are themselves to *judge what I say** May the divine assistance and blessing attend us in all!

First, I am to describe the way in which children are to be trained up.

Our translation, as I have told you, though not very literal, is agreeable to the sense of the original, *The way in which the child should go.* And undoubtedly this is no other than *the good old way*†, the way of serious practical religion: The way which God has in his word marked out for us; the way which all the children of God have trodden in every succeeding age; the way, the only way, in which we and ours can *Find rest to our souls.*

But it is not proper to leave the matter thus generally explained. I would therefore more particularly observe,—that it is the way of piety towards God,—and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;—the way of obedience to parents,—and of benevolence to all;—the way of diligence,—and of integrity:—the way of humility,—and of self-denial. I am persuaded, that each of these particulars will deserve your serious attention and regard.

1. Children should undoubtedly be trained up in the way of piety and devotion towards God.

This, as you well know, is the sum, and the foundation of every thing truly good. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning*

* 1 Cor. x. 15. † Jer. vi. 16.

*of wisdom** The Psalmist therefore invites children to him, with the promise of instructing them in it; *Come, ye children, hearken unto me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord*†. And it is certain, some right notions of the supreme Being must be implanted in the minds of children, before there can be a reasonable foundation for teaching them those doctrines which peculiarly relate to Christ under the character of the Mediator; for *He that comes unto God* (by him) *must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him*‡.

The proof of the Being of God, and some of those attributes of the divine nature in which we are most concerned, depends on such easy principles, that I cannot but think, the weakest mind might enter into it. A child will easily apprehend, that as *Every house is builded by some man*, and there can be no work without an author; so *he that built all things is God*§. And from this obvious idea of God, as the maker of all, we may naturally represent him as very great and very good, that they may be taught at once to reverence and love him.

It is of great importance, that children early imbibe an awe of God, and an humble veneration for his perfections and glories. He ought therefore to be represented to them as the great Lord of all; and when we take occasion to mention to them other invisible agents, whether angels or devils, we should, as Dr. Watts has most judiciously observed‖, always represent them as entirely under the government and controul of God, that no sentiments of admiration of good spirits, or terror of the bad, may distract their tender minds, or infringe on those regards which are the incommunicable prerogative of the great Supreme.

There should be a peculiar caution, that when we teach these infant tongues to pronounce that great and terrible name, The Lord our God, they may not learn to take it in vain; but may use it with a becoming solemnity, as remembering that we and they are *But dust and ashes* before him¶. When I hear the little creatures speaking of "the great God, the blessed God, the glorious God," as I sometimes do, it gives me a sensible pleasure, and I consider it as a probable proof of great wisdom and piety, in those who have the charge of their education.

Yet great care should be taken not to confine our discourses to these awful views, lest *the dread of God* should so *fall upon them*, as that *His excellencies* should *make them afraid* to

* Psal. cxi. 10. † Psal. xxxiv. 11. ‡ Heb. xi. 6. § Heb. iii. 4.
‖ Discourse on Catechism. ¶ Gen. xviii. 27.

approach him*. We should describe him, as not only the greatest, but the best of beings. We should teach them to know him by the most encouraging name *of the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin*†. We should represent him as the universal, kind, indulgent parent, who loves his creatures, and by all proper methods provides for their happiness. And we should particularly represent his goodness to them; with what more than parental tenderness he watched round their cradles; with what compassion he heard their feeble cries, before their infant thoughts could form themselves into prayer: We should tell them, that they live every moment on God; and that all our affection for them, is no more than he puts into our hearts; and all our power to help them, no more than he lodges in our hands.

We should also solemnly remind them, that in a very little while *their spirits* are to *return to God*‡; that as he is now always with them, and knows every thing they do, or speak, or think, so he *will bring every work into judgment*§, and make them for ever happy or miserable, as they on the whole are found obedient or rebellious. And here the most lively and pathetic descriptions, which the scripture gives us, of heaven and of hell should be laid before them, and urged on their consideration.

When such a foundation is laid, in the belief of the being and providence of God, and of a future state both of rewards and punishments, children should be instructed in the duty they owe to God, and should be particularly taught to pray to him and to praise him. It would be best of all, if from a deep sense of his perfections, and their own necessities, they could be engaged to breathe out their souls before him in words of their own, were they ever so weak and broken. Yet you will readily allow, that till this can be expected, it may be very proper to teach them some forms of prayer and thanksgiving, consisting of such plain scriptures, or other familiar expressions, as may best suit their circumstances and understandings. If the Lord's prayer be taught them, as a form, I hope you will consider, how comprehensive the expressions are; how fast the ideas rise and vary; and consequently how necessary it is, that it be frequently and largely explained to them; lest the repetition of it degenerate into a mere ceremony, as I fear it does amongst many, who are perhaps most zealous for its use.

* Job xiii. 11. † Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. ‡ Eccl. xii. 7. § Eccl. xii. 14.

But what I have said, on this head, of piety and devotion, must be considered in an inseparable connection with what I am to add under the next.

2. Children must be trained up in the way of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, my friends, and I hope many of you know it to the daily joy of your souls, that Christ is *The way, the truth, and the life*;* and that it is *by him we have boldness and access with confidence*† to a God who might otherwise appear as *a consuming fire*‡. It is therefore of great importance to lead children betimes into the knowledge of Christ, which is no doubt, a considerable part of that *nurture and admonition of the Lord*§ which the apostle recommends, and was perhaps what he principally intended by those words.‖

We should therefore teach them betimes, that the first parents of the human race most ungratefully rebelled against God, and subjected themselves and all their offspring to his wrath and curse. The awful consequences of this should be opened at large, and we should labour to convince them, that they have made themselves liable to the divine displeasure (that dreadful thing!) by their own personal guilt; and thus by the knowledge of the law should we make way for the gospel, the joyful news of deliverance by Christ.

In unfolding this, great care ought to be taken that we do not fill their minds with an aversion to one sacred person, while we endeavour to attract their regards to another. The Father is not to be represented as severe, and almost inexorable; hardly prevailed upon by the intercession of his compassionate Son to entertain thoughts of mercy and forgiveness. Far from that, we should speak of him as the overflowing fountain of goodness, whose eye pitied us in our helpless distress, whose almighty arm was stretched out for our rescue, whose eternal counsels of wisdom and love formed that important scheme to which we owe all our hopes. I have often had occasion to shew you at large, that this is the scripture-doctrine; our children should be early taught it, and taught what that scheme was, so far as their understandings can receive it, and ours can explain it. We should often repeat it to them, that God is so holy, and yet so gracious, that rather than he would on the one hand destroy man, or on the other leave sin unpunished, he made his own Son a

* John xiv. 6. † Eph. iii. 12. ‡ Heb. xii. 29. § Eph. vi. 4.

sacrifice for it, appointing him to be humbled, that we might be exalted, to die, that we might live.

We should also represent to them, (with holy wonder and joy,) how readily the Lord Jesus Christ consented to procure our deliverance in so expensive a way. How cheerfully he said, *Lo, I come; I delight to do thy will, O my God*!* To inhance the value of this amazing love, we should endeavour, according to our weak capacities, to teach them who this compassionate Redeemer is; to represent something of his glories as the eternal Son of God, and the great Lord of angels and men. We should instruct them in his amazing condescension in laying aside these glories that he might become a little weak, helpless child, and afterwards an afflicted sorrowful man. We should lead them into the knowledge of those circumstances of the history of Jesus, which may have the greatest tendency to strike their minds, and to impress them with an early sense of gratitude and love to him. We should tell them, how *poor he made himself that he might inrich us*†; how diligently he *went about doing good*‡; how willingly he preached the gospel to the lowest of the people. And we should especially tell them how kind he was to little children, and how he chid his disciples when they would have hindered them from being brought to him: It is expressly said, Jesus *was much displeased, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God*§. A tender circumstance! which perhaps was recorded, (in part at least) for this very reason, that children in succeeding ages might be impressed and affected with it.

Through these scenes of his life we should lead them on to his death: We should shew how easily he could have delivered himself, (of which he gave so sensible an evidence in striking down by one word those who came to apprehend him‖; and yet how patiently he submitted to the most cruel injuries, to be scourged and spit upon, to be crowned with thorns, and to bear his cross. We should shew them, how this innocent, holy, divine Person was *Brought as a lamb to the slaughter*¶; and while they were piercing him with nails, instead of loading them with curses, he prayed for them, saying, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do***. And when their little hearts are awed and melted with so strange a story, we should tell them, it was thus he groaned, and bled, and died for us,

* Psal. xl. 7, 8. † 2 Cor. viii. 9. ‡ Acts x. 38. § Mark x. 13, 14.
‖ John xviii. 9. ¶ Isai. liii. 7. ** Luke xxiii. 34.

and often remind them of their own concern in what was then transacted.

We should lead on their thoughts to the glorious views of Christ's resurrection and ascension; and tell them with what adorable goodness he still remembers his people in the midst of his exaltation; pleading the cause of sinful creatures, and employing his interest in the court of heaven, to procure life and glory for all that believe in him and love him.

We should then go on to instruct them in those particulars of obedience, by which the sincerity of our faith and our love is to be approved; at the same time reminding them of their own weakness, and telling them how God helps us, by sending his holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts, to furnish us for every good word and work. An important lesson, without attending to which our instruction will be vain, and their hearing will likewise be vain!

3. Children should be trained up in the way of obedience to their parents.

This is a command which God recommended from Mount Sinai, by annexing to it a peculiar promise of long life*; a blessing which young persons greatly desire. The apostle therefore observes, that it is *The first commandment with promise*†; i. e. a command eminently remarkable for the manner in which the promise is adjoined. And it is certainly a wise constitution of providence, that gives so much to parental authority, especially while children are in their younger years, their minds being then incapable of judging and acting for themselves in matters of importance. Children should therefore be early taught and convinced by scripture, that God has committed them into the hands of their parents; and consequently, that reverence and obedience to their parents, is a part of the duty they owe to God, and disobedience to them, is rebellion against him. And parents should by no means indulge their children in a direct and resolute opposition to their will in matters of greater or smaller moment; remembering, that *a child left to himself bringeth his parents to shame*‡, and himself to ruin; and with regard to subjection, as well as affection, *It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth*§.

4. Children should be trained up in the way of benevolence and kindness to all.

* Exod. xx. 12. † Eph. vi. 2. ‡ Prov. xxix. 15. § Lam. iii. 27.

The great apostle tells us, that *Love is the fulfilling of the law**, and that all those branches of it, which relate to our neighbour, are comprehended *in* that *one word, love*†. This love therefore we should endeavour to teach them; and we shall find, that in many instances it will be a law to itself, and guide them right in many particular actions, the obligations to which may depend on principles of equity, which lie far beyond the reach of their feeble understandings.

There is hardly an instruction relating to our duty more happily adapted to the capacity of children, than that golden law, (so important to all of the maturest age) *Whatsoever ye would that others should do unto you, do ye so unto them*‡. This rule we should teach them, and by this should examine their actions. From their cradles we should often inculcate it upon them, that a great deal of religion consists in doing good; that *The wisdom from above is full of mercy and good fruits*§; and that every christian should *do good unto all as he has opportunity*‖.

That such instructions may be welcome to them we should endeavour, by all prudent methods, to soften their hearts to sentiments of humanity and tenderness, and guard against every thing that would have a contrary tendency. We should remove from them, as much as possible, all kinds of cruel and bloody spectacles, and should carefully discourage any thing barbarous in their treatment of brute creatures; by no means allowing them to sport themselves in the death or pain of domestic animals, but rather teaching them to treat the poor creatures kindly, and take care of them; the contrary to which is a most detestable sign of a savage and malignant disposition. The merciful *man regardeth the life of his beast*¶.

We should likewise take care to teach them the odiousness and folly of a selfish temper, and encourage them in a willingness to impart to others, what is agreeable and entertaining to themselves; especially we should endeavour to form them to sentiments of compassion for the poor. We should shew them where God has said, *Blessed is the man that considereth the poor, the Lord will remember him in the day of trouble***. *He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given, will he pay him again*††. And we should shew them, by our own practice, that we verily believe these promises to be true, and important. It might not be improper sometimes to make our children the messengers, by

* Rom. xiii. 19. † Gal. v. 14. ‡ Mat. vii. 12. § James iii. 17.
‖ Gal. vi. 10. ¶ Prov. xii. 10. ** Psal. xli. 1. †† Prov. xix. 17.

which we send some small supply to the indigent and distressed; and if they discover a disposition to give something out of the little stock we allow them to call their own, we should joyfully encourage it, and should take care that they never lose by their charity, but that in a prudent manner we abundantly repay it. It is hardly to be imagined, that children thus brought up should, in the advance of life, prove injurious and oppressive; they will rather be the ornaments of religion, and blessings to the world, and probably will be in the number of the last whom providence will suffer to want.

5. Children should be trained up in the way of diligence.

This should undoubtedly be our care, if we have any regard to the welfare, either of their bodies, or their souls. In whatever station of life they may at length be fixed, it is certain there is little prospect of their acquitting themselves with usefulness, honour and advantage, without a close and resolute application; whereas the wisest of princes and of men has said, *Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men**. And it is evident, that a diligent prosecution of business keeps one out of the way of a thousand temptations, which idleness seems to invite, leading a man into numberless instances of vice and folly, because he has nothing else to do†.

A prudent and religious parent will therefore be concerned, that his children may not early contract so pernicious a habit, nor enter upon life, like persons that have no business in it, but to croud the stage, and stand in the way of those who are better employed. Instead of suffering them to saunter about from place to place, (as abundance of young people do, to no imaginable purpose of usefulness, or even of entertainment) he will quickly assign them some employment for their time: An employment so moderated, and so diversified, as not to overwhelm and fatigue their tender spirits‡; yet sufficient to keep them wakeful and active. Nor is this so difficult as some may imagine; for children are a busy kind of creatures, naturally fond of learning new things, and trying and shewing what they can do. So that, I am persuaded, were perfect inactivity

* Prov. xxii. 29.

† Thus it is said of Ægisthus,

——— Ne nil ageretur, amavit.——Ovid.

‡ 'Nec sum adeo Ætatum imprudens, ut instandum teneris protinus acerbe putem, exigendamque plenam operam.———Lusus hic sit, &c.——Quintil. Orat. Lib. i. Cap. 1.

to be imposed upon them as a penance, but for one hour, they would be heartily weary of it, and would be glad to seek their refuge from it, in almost any business you would think fit to employ them about.

Thus should they be disciplined in their infant years, should early be taught the value of time, and early accustomed to improve it, till they grow fit for some calling in life; in which they should at length be placed with this important maxim deeply ingraven upon their minds, "That full employ in whatever service they are fixed, is a thing by no means to be dreaded, but, on the contrary, greatly to be desired."

I shall conclude this head with the mention of a very remarkable law amongst the Athenians, which ordained, "That those, who had been brought up to no employ by their parents, should not be obliged to keep them, if they came to want in their old age; which all other (legitimate) children were*.

6. Children should be trained up in the way of integrity.

Simplicity and godly sincerity† is not only a very amiable, but an essential part of the christian character; and we are every one of us indispensably obliged to approve ourselves *Israelites indeed, in whom there is no* allowed *guile*‡. And this is a circumstance that will peculiarly require our regard, in the education of our children, and of all young persons under our care.

It is very melancholy to observe, how soon the artifices and deceits of corrupt nature begin to discover themselves. In this respect we are *Transgressors from the womb, and go astray* almost *as soon as we are born, speaking lies*§. Great care therefore should be taken to form the minds of children to a love for truth and candour, and a sense of the meanness, as well as the guilt of a lie. We should be cautious, that we do not expose them to any temptations of this kind, either by unreasonable severities, on account of little faults, or by hasty surprises when enquiring into any matter of fact, which it may seem their interest to disguise by a falsehood: And when we find them guilty of a known and deliberate lie, we should express our horror of it, not only by a present reproof or correction, but by such a conduct towards them for some time afterwards, as may plainly shew them how greatly we are amazed, grieved, and displeased. When so solemn a business is made of the

* Potter's Greek Antiq. vol. i. page 142.

† 2 Cor. i. 12. ‡ John i. 47. § Psal. lviii. 3.

first faults of this kind, it may be a means of preventing many more.

I will farther add, that we ought not only thus severely to animadvert upon a direct lie, but likewise, in a proper degree to discourage all kinds of equivocations and double meanings, and those little tricks and artifices, by which they may endeavour to impose on each other, or on those that are older than themselves. We should often inculcate upon them that excellent scripture, *He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but he that perverteth his way*, (that twists and distorts it with the perplexities of artifice and deceit) *shall* at length *be known**. Be shewing them every day, how easy, how pleasant, how honourable, and how advantageous it is to maintain a fair, open, honest temper; and on the other hand, what folly there is in cunning and dishonesty in all its forms; and how certain it is, that by studying and practising it, they take the readiest way to make themselves noxious and useless, infamous and odious. Above all should we remind them, that *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his* favourable *countenance beholds the upright*†; but *lying lips are* such *an abomination to him*‡, that he expressly declares, *All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone*§.

7. Children should be trained up in the way of humility.

This is a grace, which our Lord particularly invites us to *Learn of him*‖, and most frequently recommends to us; well knowing, that without it, so humbling a scheme as he came to introduce, would never meet with a welcome reception. And with regard to the present life, it is a most lovely ornament, which engages universal esteem and affection; so that *Before honour is humility*¶: On the whole we find, *He that exalteh himself is abased, and he that humbleth himself is exalted*** both by God and man.

A regard therefore to the ease, honour, and happiness of our children, should engage us to an early endeavour of checking that pride, which was the first sin, and the ruin of our natures; and diffuses itself so wide, and sinks so deep, into all that draw their original from degenerate Adam. We should teach them to express humility and modesty in their converse with all.

* Prov. x. 9. מועקש (à עקש) huc illuc se flexit.

† Psal. xi. 7. ‡ Prov. xii. 22. § Rev. xxi. 8.

‖ Mat. xi. 28. ¶ Prov. xv. 33. ** Mat. xxiii. 12.

They should be taught to treat their superiors with peculiar respect, and should at proper seasons be accustomed to silence and reserve before them. Hence they will learn in some degree the government of the tongue; a branch of wisdom, which, in the advance of life, will be of great importance to the quiet of others, and to their own comfort and reputation.

Nor should they be allowed to assume airs of insolence towards their equals; but rather be taught to yield, to oblige, and to give up their right for the sake of peace. To this purpose I cannot but think it desirable, that they should be generally accustomed to treat each other with those forms of civility and complaisance, which are usual among well-bred people in their rank of life. I know these things are mere trifles in themselves, yet they are the out-guards of humanity and friendship, and effectually prevent many a rude attack, which taking its rise from some little circumstance, may nevertheless be attended with fatal consequences. I thought it proper to mention this here, because, as Scougal very justly and elegantly expresses it*, "These modes are the shadows of humility, and seem intended to shew our regard for others, and the low thoughts we have of ourselves."

I shall only add farther, that it is great imprudence and unkindness to children, to indulge them in a haughty and imperious behaviour towards those who are most their inferiors. They should be made to understand, that the servants of the family are not their servants, nor to be under their government and controul. I the rather insist upon this, because I have generally observed, that where young people have been permitted to tyrannize over persons in the lowest circumstances of life, the humour has shamefully grown upon them, till it has diffused insolence and arrogance through their behaviour to all about them.

Lastly, Children should be trained up in the way of self-denial.

As without something of this temper we can never follow Christ, or expect to be owned by him as his disciples; so neither indeed can we pass comfortably through the world. For, whatever unexperienced youth may dream, a great many distasteful and mortifying circumstances will occur in life, which will unhinge our minds almost every hour, if we cannot manage, and in many instances deny our appetites, our passions, and our humours. We should therefore endeavour to teach our children

* Scougal's Life of God, page 45.

this important lesson betimes; and if we succeed in our care, we shall leave them abundantly richer and happier, in this rule and possession of their own spirits, than the most plentiful estates, or the most unlimited power over others, could make them.

When a rational creature becomes the slave of appetite, he sinks beneath the dignity of the human nature, as well as the sanctity of the christian profession. It is therefore observable, that when the apostle mentions the three grand branches of practical religion, he puts *sobriety* in the front; perhaps to intimate, that where that is neglected, the other cannot be suitably regarded. *The grace of God*, (i. e. the gospel,) *teaches us, to live soberly, righteously, and godly**." Children therefore, as well as young men, should be *exhorted to be sober-minded*† : And they should be taught it, by early self-denial. It is certain, that if their own appetite and taste, were to determine the kind and quantity of their food, many of them would quickly destroy their constitution, and perhaps their lives; since they have often the greatest desire for those things, which are the most improper. And it seems justly observed by a very wise man, who was himself a melancholy instance of it, "That the fondness of mothers for their children, in letting them eat and drink what they will, lays a foundation for most of those calamities in human life, which proceed from bodily indisposition‡." Nay, I will add that it is the part of wisdom and love, not only to deny what would be unwholesome, but to guard against indulging them in too great a nicety, either of food or dress. People of sense cannot but see, if they would please to consider it, that to know how to fare plainly, and sometimes a little hardly, carries a man with ease and pleasure through many circumstances of life, which to luxury and delicacy would be almost intolerable.

The government of the passions is another branch of self-denial, to which children should early be habituated; and so much the rather, because, in an age when reason is so weak, the passions are apt to appear with peculiar force and violence. A prudent care should therefore be taken to repress the exhorbitancies of them. For which purpose it is of great importance, that they never be suffered to carry any point, by obstinacy, noise, and clamour, which is indeed to bestow a reward on a fault that deserves a severe reprimand. Nay, I will venture to add, that though it be very inhuman to take pleasure in

* Tit. ii. 11, 12. † Tit. ii. 6.

‡ Baxter's Practical Works, vol. iii. page 746.

making them uneasy by needless mortifications, yet when they are eagerly and intemperately desirous of a trifle, they ought, for that very reason, sometimes to be denied it, to teach them more moderation for the future. And if by such methods, they gradually learn to conquer their little humours and fancies, they learn no inconsiderable branch of true fortitude and wisdom. I cannot express this better, than in the words of Mr. Locke*, in his excellent treatise on the subject before us; "He that has found out the way to keep a child's spirit easy, active and free, and yet at the same time to restrain him from many things which he has a mind to, and draw him to things uneasy to him, has got the true secret of education."

I have sometimes been surprised to see, how far a sense of honour and praise has carried some children of a generous temper, in a long and resolute course of self-denial. But undoubtedly the noblest principle of all is a sense of religion. Happy would it indeed be, if they were led to see, that there is but very little in this kind of gratification and indulgences; that the world itself is but a poor empty trifle; and that the great thing a rational creature should be concerned about, is to please God, and get well to heaven. May divine grace teach us this important lesson for ourselves, that we may transmit it with greater advantage to our children! Amen.

* Locke on Education, § 46.

SERMON II.

ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDEN.

Arguments to enforce the Duty.

Prov. xxii. 6.—*Train up a Child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

IT is certainly a very pleasing reflection to every faithful minister of the gospel, that the cause, in which he is engaged, is the most benevolent, as well as the most religious; subserving the glory of God, by promoting the happiness of mankind. It must be a great satisfaction to a man of integrity and humanity, to think that it is not his business to dazzle and confound his hearers with the artifices of speech, to give the appearances of truth to falsehood and importance to trifles; but to teach them to weigh things in an impartial balance, and by the words of truth and soberness, to lead them into the paths of wisdom and of goodness.

This is a satisfaction which I peculiarly find this day, while I am urging you to that religious care in the education of children, which I have at large opened in the former discourse. And it is a circumstance of additional pleasure, that I am pleading the cause of the weak and the helpless; of little tender creatures, who are incapable of pleading for themselves, and know not how much their interest is concerned. Nor am I without a secret hope, that if the Divine Spirit favour us with his assistance, some who are yet unborn may have eternal reason to rejoice in the fruits of what you are now to hear. Amen.

Having already endeavoured to describe the way in which children are to be trained up; I now proceed,

Secondly, To propose some arguments to engage parents to this pious care.

And here I would intreat you distinctly to consider,—that the attempt itself is pleasant;—you have great reason to hope it may be successful;—and that success is of the highest importance.

I. The attempt itself is pleasant.

I speak not merely of the pleasure arising from the consciousness of discharging present duty, and a probable view of future success; such a satisfaction may attend those actions, which are in themselves most painful and mortifying. But I refer to the entertainment immediately flowing from the employment itself, when rightly managed. This is undoubtedly one of those *ways of wisdom, which are ways of pleasantness*, as well as a *path*, which in its consequences is *peace* and happiness* : It is a *commandment, in keeping of which there is great reward*†.

The God of nature has wisely annexed a secret unutterable delight, to all our regular cares for the improvement of our rising offspring. We rejoice to see our tender plants flourish, to observe how the stock strengthens, and the blossoms and the leaves successively unfold. We trace with a gradually advancing pleasure, their easy smiles, the first efforts of speech on their stammering tongues, and the dawnings of reason in their feeble minds. It is a delightful office to cultivate and assist opening nature‡, to lead the young strangers into a new world, and to infuse the principles of any useful kind of knowledge, which their age may admit, and their circumstances require. But when we attempt to raise their thoughts to the great Father of Spirits, to present them, as in the arms of faith, to Jesus the compassionate Shepherd, and teach them to enquire after him; when we endeavour to instruct them in the principles of divine truth, and form them to sentiments of prudence, integrity and generosity; we find a pleasure superior to what any other labour for their improvement can give.

On this occasion, my friends, I persuade myself I may appeal to the repeated experience of many amongst you. Do you not find, that the sweetest truths of christianity, which are your hope and your joy in this house of your pilgrimage, are peculiarly sweet when you talk them over with your children? Do you not find, that your instructions and admonitions to them return into your own bosom with a rich increase of edification and refreshment? Thus while you are watering these domestic plantations, you are *watering also yourselves*§; and from these

* Prov. iii. 17. † Psal. xix. 11.

‡ Delightful task! To rear the tender thought,
To teach the young idea how to shoot,
To pour the fresh instruction o'er the mind,
——————————— and plant
The generous purpose in the glowing breast.
THOMPSON'S SPRING, p. 57.

§ Prov. xi. 25.

holy converses with your children, you rise to more endearing communion with your heavenly Father: God by his Spirit visiting your souls in the midst of those pious cares, and giving you immediate comfort and strength, as a token of his gracious acceptance, and perhaps as a pledge of future success. This leads me to urge the religious education of children,

II. By the probability there is, that it will be attended with such success, as to be the means of making them wise and good.

This is the arrangement urged by Solomon in the text, *train up a child in the way in which he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.* Being early initiated into the right way, he will pursue it with increasing pleasure; so that with regard to the prosperity of the soul, as well as of the body, his path will be like the morning *light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day**

It is true, this assertion is to be understood with some limitation, as expressing the probability, rather than the certainty of the success; otherwise experience would contradict it in some melancholy instances. Would to God there were none untractable under the most pious and prudent methods of education; none, who *Like deaf adders stop their ears* against *the voice of the* most skilful *charmers*†, and have been accustomed to do it from their infancy! Would to God there were none of those, who appeared to set out well, and seemed eager in enquiring *the way to Zion with their faces thitherward*‡, who have forgotten *The guides of their youth, and the covenant of their God*§, and are to this day wandering in the paths of the destroyer, if they are not already fallen in them! But do you throw by every medicine, which some have used without being recovered by it; or decline every profession, of which there are some who do not thrive? What remedy must you then take? What calling must you then pursue? The application is obvious. It would be folly to pretend to maintain, that religious education will certainly obtain its end; but let me intreat you to consider, that it is in its own nature a very rational method, that it is a method which God has appointed, and a method which in many instances has been found successful. Attend seriously to these remarks, and then judge whether prudence and conscience will not oblige you to pursue it.

* Prov. iv. 18. † Psal. lviii. 4, 5. ‡ Jer. l. 5. § Prov. ii. 17.

1. The religious education of children is a very rational method of engaging them to walk in the way in which they should go.

There is this most evident advantage attending our early attempts of this kind, that we shall find the minds more opened and disengaged, not tainted with all these corrupt principles, nor enslaved to those irregular habits, which they would probably imbibe and contract in the advance of age. Though the paper on which we would write the knowledge of God be not entirely fair, it is clear of many a foul inscription and deep blot, with which it would soon be covered. Though the garden, in which we would plant the fruits of holiness, be not free from weeds, yet many of them are but (as it were) in the invisible seed, and the rest are not grown up to that luxurious size, which we must expect, if due cultivation be omitted or delayed.

It is a farther advantage which deserves to be mentioned here, that infancy and childhood is the most impressible age; and as principles are then most easily admitted, so they are most firmly retained. The ancients, those judicious observers of human nature, as well as many modern writers, are full of this remark in their discourses on education, and illustrate it by a great many beautiful allusions which are well known.

The new vessel takes a lasting tincture from the liquor which is first poured in*: The soft clay is easily fashioned into what form you please†: The young plant may be bent with a gentle hand; and the characters, engraved on the tender bark, grow deeper and larger with the advancing tree‡. It will be our wisdom then to seize these golden opportunities; and so much the rather, as it is certain they will either be improved, or perverted; and that, if they are not pressed into the service of religion, they will be employed as dangerous artillery against it§.

But you will say, "With all these advantageous circumstances, we cannot infuse grace into the hearts of our children; and after all our precautions, corrupt nature will prevent us,

* Quo semel est imbuta recens, servabit odorem
Testa diu.—— Horat. Epist. Lib. i. No. 2. v. 69, 70.

† Udum & molle lutum es: Nunc, nunc properandus, & acri
Figendus sine fine rotâ.—— Pers. Sat. III. v. 22, 23.

Et Naturâ tenacissimi sumus eorum, quæ rudibus annis percipimus; ut sapor quo nova imbuas, durat; nec lanarum colores, quibus simplex ille candor mutatus est, elui possunt. Quintil. Orat. Lib. i. Cap. 1.

Ut corpora ad quosdam membrorum flexus formari, nisi tenera, non possunt sic animos quoque ad pleraque, duriores robur ipsum facit. Ibid.

‡ Bates's Works, page 636.

§ Hæc ipsa magis pertinaciter harent, quæ pejora sunt. Quintil. Orat. Lib. i. Cap. 1.

and fix a wrong bias on the mind, before we can attempt to direct it aright." A mournful, but too evident truth? which, far from denying or suppressing, I would often declare and inculcate; and the rather now, as it greatly confirms my argument. Are the influences of a degenerate nature unavoidably so strong, and will you suffer them to be confirmed by these additional advantages? Do you apprehend, that *Running with the footmen*, you shall be in danger of *fainting*; and do you for the very reason chuse to *contend with the horsemen**? You cannot sure, in the face of so much reason and scripture, urge this as an excuse against making any attempts at all of this kind; and how then is it an apology for the neglect of those, which are, other things being equal, the most rational and easy? But the trifling plea is more evidently silenced, by observing:

2. The religious education of children is a method which God has appointed; and this greatly increases the probability of its success.

I assuredly know, and may God more deeply engrave it on our hearts! that with regard to your labours, as well as ours, *Neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase*†. But consider, I beseech you, how that increase is to be hoped for: Is it in the omission, or in the use of prescribed means? I urge it on your consciences, my friends, that religious education is an ordinance of God, which, therefore, you may reasonably hope he will honour with a blessing. And you might as justly expect, that your souls should flourish in an unnecessary absence from the table and house of the Lord, or an habitual neglect of reading and prayer; as that your children should grow up for God, while you fail in your endeavours to engage them in his service. I repeat it again, religious education is an ordinance of God. And is it a work of labour and difficulty to prove the assertion? Which of you does not know that christian parents are solemnly charged to *Bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*‡; and that even under the Mosaic economy, God urged it on his people in a very affecting manner? Surely you must have observed, how strictly God charged it upon the Jews to take all opportunities to this purpose, occasional, as well as stated. *These words*, says he, *which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine*

* Jer. xii. 5. † 1 Cor. iii. 7. ‡ Eph. vi 4.

*house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up**. And elsewhere, *Thou shalt teach them to thy sons, and thy sons sons* †: Plainly recommending a care of more remote, as well as immediate descendants, of grand children, as well as children. Thus when God *Established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, he commanded the fathers, that they should make them known unto their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children that should be born, that they should arise and declare them to their children*‡; that so religion might be transmitted to every rising age. You cannot be ignorant of such passages as these, which need no comment to explain them, and consequently you cannot but know, that the religious education of children is a divine institution, as well as in itself a most rational attempt: After which you will not wonder to hear,

3. That it has in fact been attended with very happy success.

We acknowledge, that the great God does not confine himself to work by this way; and that he sometimes displays his sovereignty in visibly turning out of it. We acknowledge, that he sometimes leaves those, who had been, as it were, born and brought up in his family, to forsake it in a very scandalous manner: while he seems to go into the territories of satan, into ignorant, carnal, profane families, and takes from thence persons, whom he erects as trophies of free, surprising, and (as Mr. Howe justly expresses it,) "unaccountable grace." But you well know, that these are more rare and uncommon cases: And though some of you, my friends, are and I hope you will never forget it,) happy instances of the singular divine goodness; yet most of you, as I apprehend, were from your childhood trained up in the knowledge of God, and are living monuments of the success which has attended the care of parents, or masters in this particular. The greater part of those, who have of late been admitted to your communion, have, to my certain knowledge, mentioned it with thankfulness; and I rejoice to think, how many of the rising generation amongst us, (if even a child may be known by his doings§, are like to encrease the number, and give us an encouraging hope that they will at length be set as olive-plants around the Lord's table, as well as yours. I persuade myself it is so elsewhere, and think I may pronounce it with some confidence, that the families of God's children are, generally speaking, the nurseries of his church. Solomon, no

* Deut. vi. 6, 7. † Deut. iv. 9. ‡ Psal. lxxviii. 5, 6. § Prov. xx. 11.

doubt, had observed, that a good education had generally been successful, or we could by no means account for the remark in the text; and a very accurate writer of our own age and nation has carried it so far as to say, "That of all the men we meet with, nine parts in ten are what they are, good or bad, useful or not, according to their education*."

I hope you are by this time convinced, that, humanly speaking, there is great probability, that religious education may be the effectual means of promoting serious piety in the rising age; which was the second argument by which I was to recommend it: An argument, which may be greatly strengthened, by observing,

III. That the success, which we may so reasonably expect, is a matter of very high importance.

It is of evident importance—to the honour of God, and the support of religion,—to the present and future happiness of your children,—and to your own comfort both in life and death. Weighty and comprehensive thoughts! which I shall briefly touch†, and to which I beg you will renew your attention.

1. The honour of God, and the interest of a Redeemer, is greatly concerned in the behaviour of your children; and consequently in your care of their education, which is like to have so great an influence upon it.

We live in a dying world. Our fathers, where are they‡? Sleeping in the dust, as we must shortly be. We are sure, that in a little, a very little while, these *places must know us no more*§: And when we are mouldering in the house of silence, who must fill our places in the house of God? Who must rise up in our stead for the support of religion amongst those that succeed us? From whom can it be expected, but from our children? Yet how can we expect it from these, in the neglect of a method, which comes recommended by so many advantageous circumstances? "Yes," you will perhaps be ready to say, "God will take care of his own cause, and almighty grace will do what we have not attempted, because we knew that we could not accomplish it." Almighty grace can indeed do it; and almighty power can *of*

* Locke on Education, §. 1.

† I omit many things which might be said on these heads, because I have opened them more largely in a sermon on this very subject, The Importance of the Rising Generation, which is the first of those sermons to young persons, which are now reprinted in the same form as these.

‡ Zech. i. 5. § Job vii. 10.

these stones, on which we tread, *raise up children to Abraham**. But shew me your warrant from the word of God for expecting it, either in the one case, or in the other. You will possibly answer, "He has promised to be ever with his church†, and that *The gates of hell shall not prevail against it*‡; but that *One generation shall arise and declare his mighty works unto another*§, and that the kingdom of his Son shall continue *As long as the sun and the moon endure*‖." Blessed be his name for these encouraging promises, which shall no doubt be accomplished. But where has he engaged, that this kingdom shall always continue amongst us? Such passages as these will no more prove, that the gospel shall never be removed from Great-Britain, than they would once have proved, that it should never be taken away from Pergamos or Thyatira, or any other of the Asian-churches, which have so many ages ago been given up to desolation.

Now let me intreat you, for a few moments, to dwell upon that thought; what if the gospel should be lost from amongst your descendants! what if in the age of these little ones, or the next that shall succeed to theirs, the house of the Lord should be forsaken, and his table abandoned? What if the ministry should be grown into disuse, or the servants of Christ in it should have nothing to do, but to bear a fruitless testimony against an unbelieving generation, till, when their hearts are broken with so sad an office, the gospel here die with them, and religion be buried in their graves? Is it a thought easily to be supported by a true Israelite, that the ark of the Lord should thus be lost, and God should write upon us *Icabod*¶, the sad memorials of a *departed glory!*

It would surely be peculiarly melancholy, that religion should die in the hands of those who were the children of the kingdom. And were not yours so? In this respect, my friends, permit me to say, that I am witness against some of you. When you have offered your children to baptism, you have delivered them into my hands, with an express declaration of your sincere desire, that they might be devoted to God; and have received them again with a solemn charge and promise to bring them up for him, if their lives should be continued. And as for those of you, who do not practise this institution, I doubt not, but many of you are equally faithful in dedicating your infant-offspring to God, is it not then reasonable to expect them both,

* Mat. iii. 9. † Mat. xxviii. ‡ Mat. xvi. 18.
§ Psal. cxlv. 4. ‖ Psal. lxxii. 5. ¶ 1 Sam. iv. 21.

that they should be brought up as a seed to serve him? And from whom may we hope it, if not from you? If you have experienced the power of divine grace upon your own souls, and have *Tasted that the Lord is gracious**, methinks it should awaken the holy zeal to spread the sweet savour of his name and word wherever you come: You should labour to the utmost for the advancement of his gospel amongst all your acquaintance, and even amongst strangers; how much more in your own families, amongst those whom you have received from him, amongst those whom you have so solemnly given back to him.

2. The character of your children, and consequently your care in their education, is of the most evident importance to their present and future happiness.

I need not surely employ a great deal of time in proving the truth of the assertion. As christians you must undoubtedly own, that *Godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life which now is*, as well as *of that which is to come*†. If your children, through the divine blessing on your holy care, become truly religious, they will not only be preserved from those follies and crimes, which stain the honour, and ruin the substance of families, but they will secure a fair reputation, will take the most probable method to make life truly comfortable; they will be entitled to the paternal care and blessing of God; and, to crown all, will be heirs of eternal glory with him: And what could your most prudent, faithful, tender love wish for them as a greater, or indeed as a comparable good? On the other hand, if they prove vicious and profane, (which in so degenerate an age it is very probable they may, if they have no religious principle to secure them,) what can you expect but their infamy and misery in this world, and their eternal destruction in the next?

One would imagine, that such considerations as these should very deeply impress the heart of a parent; and if they were alone should be sufficient to gain the cause. You, who have so tender a regard to all their temporal concerns; you, that rise early and sit up late, that you may advance their fortunes, that you may furnish them with those dubious and uncertain possessions, which may be blessings or curses, as they are improved or abused; can you bear to think, that they may be for ever poor and miserable? Surely it should cut you to the

* 1 Pet. ii. 3. † 1 Tim. iv. 8.

heart to look on a child and reflect, "Here is an heir of eternal misery: Alas! what am I doing for him? preparing an estate? Contriving for his present convenience or grandeur?" Vain, wretched, preposterous care! which, to use a very plain simile, is but like employing yourselves in trimming and adorning its cloaths, while the child itself were fallen into the fire, and would be in danger of being destroyed, if not immediately plucked out. Hasten to do it with an earnestness answerable to the extremity of the case, and so much the rather, as the danger is in part owing to you.

I will not now say, how far your personal mistakes in conduct may have been a snare and a temptation to your children; nor can I pretend to determine it. But I am confident of this, that they have derived from you a corrupt and degenerate nature. Through your veins the original infection, which tainted the first authors of our race, has flowed down to them. And is not this an affecting thought? and ought it not to quicken you to attempt their relief?

Dr. Tillotson sets this in a very moving light: "*When a man has by treason tainted his blood and forfeited his estate, with what grief and regret does he look on his children, and think of the injury he has done to them by his fault; and how solicitous is he before he die to petition the king for favour to his children! How earnestly does he charge his friends to be careful of them, and kind to them!" We are those traitors. Our children have derived from us a tainted blood, a forfeited inheritance. How tenderly should we pity them! How solicitously should we exert ourselves to prevent their ruin! Mr. Flavel expresses the thought still more pathetically. "†Should I bring the plague into my family, and live to see all my poor children lie dying by the walls of my house; if I had not the heart of a tyger, such a sight would melt my very soul." And surely, I may add, were there a sovereign antidote at hand, perhaps an antidote I had myself used, should I not direct them to it, and urge them to try it, I should be still more savage and criminal. The application is easy: The Lord deeply impress it upon your souls, that your dear children may not die eternally of the malignant plague they have taken from you!

This is one consideration, which should certainly add a great deal of weight to the argument I am now upon. I will conclude the head with the mention of another: I mean the

* Tillotson, vol. I. sermon LIII. page 544.
† Flavel's Husb. spir. page 260.

peculiar advantages which you their parents have for addressing yourselves to them. You, who have known them from their infancy, are best acquainted with their temper, and manner of thinking; you, who are daily with them, may watch their most tender moments, the most favourable opportunities of pleading with them; your melting affection for them, will suggest the most endearing sentiments and words on such occasions: Their obligations to you, and love for you, will probably dispose them to attend with the greater pleasure to what you may say; or your authority over them, your power of correction, and a sense of their dependance upon you in life, may prevent much of that opposition and contempt, which from perverse tempers, others might expect; especially if they were supported by your concurrence, in their attempts to instruct and reform your children.

On the whole then, since your obligations and your encouragements to attempt the work are so peculiar, I may reasonably hope you will allow its due weight to this second consideration, that the character and conduct of your children, and consequently your care in their education, is of the highest importance to their present and future happiness. I add, once more:

3. It is of great moment to your own comfort, both in life and death.

Solomon often repeats the substance of that remark; *A wise son maketh a glad father, but a foolish son is a heaviness to his mother**. And the justice of it in both its branches is very apparent. Let me engage you seriously to reflect upon it, as a most awakening inducement, to the discharge of the important duty I am recommending.

If you have reason to hope, that your labours are not in vain, but that your children are become truly religious; it must greatly increase your satisfaction in them, that they are dear to you, not only in the bands of the flesh, but in those of the Lord. You will not only be secure of their dutiful and grateful behaviour to you, but you will have the pleasure of seeing them grow up in their different stations, to prospects of usefulness in the church, and in the world. Should providence spare you to the advance of age, they will be a comfort and honour to your declining years. You will, as it were, enjoy a second

* Prov. x. 1.

youth in their vigour and usefulness; nay, a sense of their piety and goodness will undoubtedly be a reviving cordial to you in your dying moments. A delightful thought will it indeed be! "I am going to take my leave of the world, and my scene of service is over; but I leave those behind me, who will appear for God in my stead, and act, perhaps, with greater fidelity and zeal, for the support of religion in a degenerate age. I leave my dear children, destitute indeed of my counsel and help, perhaps in no abundant affluence of worldly enjoyments; but I leave them under the guardian care of my Father, and their Father, of my God and their God. I must soon be separated from them, and the distance between us must soon be as great, as between earth and heaven: But as I leave them under the best guidance in the wildernes, so I have a joyful persuasion they will soon follow me into the celestial Canaan. Yet a little while, and I, and my dear offspring, shall appear together before the throne of God; and I shall stand forth with transport, and say, *Behold, here am I, and the children which* my *God has* graciously *given me.* Then will the blessedness on which I now enter, be multiplied upon me, by the sight of every child that has a share in it. *Now*, Lord, *sufferest* thou *thy servant to depart in peace*, since thou hast directed, not only *mine eyes*, but theirs, to *thy salvation.*"

But if you see these dear little ones grow up for the destroyer; if you see those, whose infant days have given you so many tender pleasures, and so many fond hopes, deviating from the paths of duty and happiness, how deeply will it pierce you! You now look upon them with a soft complacency, and say, "These are they, that shall comfort us under our labours and our sorrows:" But alas! my friends, if this be the case, "These are they, that will increase your labours; and aggravate your sorrows; that will hasten upon you the infirmities of age, or crush you the faster under the weight of them, till they have brought down your hoary hairs with anguish to the grave." Little do they or you think, how much agony and distress you may endure, from what you will see, and what you will fear concerning them. How many slighted admonitions, how many deluded hopes, how many anxious days, how many restless nights, will concur to make the evening of life gloomy! And at length, when God gives you a dismission from a world, which the folly and wickedness of your children has so long imbittered, how painful will the separation be; when you have a prospect of seeing them but once more, and that at the tribunal of God, where the best you can expect, in their present

circumstances, is to *rise up in judgment against them*, and to bear an awful testimony, which shall draw down upon them aggravated damnation!

And let me plainly tell you, that if in these last moments, conscience should also accuse you of the neglect of duty, and testify that your own sorrow and your children's ruin, is in part chargeable upon that, it will be a dreadful ingredient in this bitter cup, and may greatly darken, if not entirely suppress those hopes with regard to yourselves, which alone could support you in this mournful scene. I am fully persuaded, that if you knew the weight with which these things will sit upon your mind in the immediate views of the eternal world, you would not suffer every trifling difficulty, or little care, to deter you from the discharge of those duties, which are so necessary to prevent these galling reflections.

To conclude: Let me intreat you seriously to weigh the united force of those arguments, which I have now been urging, to excite your diligence in this momentous care of training up your children in the way in which they should go. Consider how pleasant the attempt is:—Consider how fair a probability there is that it may prosper, as it is in itself a very rational method, as it is a method God has appointed, and a method which he has crowned with singular success:—Consider how important that success is, to the honour of God and the interest of religion, to the temporal and eternal happiness of your children, and finally, to your own comfort both in life and death.

On the whole I well know, and I am persuaded, Sirs, that you yourselves are convinced, that whatsoever can be opposed to such considerations as these, when laid in an impartial balance, it is altogether lighter than vanity. I do therefore seriously appeal to those convictions of your consciences, as in the sight of God: And if, from this time at least, the education of children amongst you be neglected, or regarded only as a light care, God is witness, and you yourselves are witnesses, that it is not for want of being plainly instructed in your duty, or seriously urged to the performance of it.

SERMON III.

ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

Advice to Parents.

Prov. xxii. 6.—*Train up a Child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.*

THOSE of you who have made any observations on human life, must certainly know, that if we desire to be agreeable and useful in it, we must regard not only the quality, but the manner of our actions; and that while we are in the pursuit of any important end, we must not only attend to those actions which do immediately refer to it, but must watch over the whole of our conduct; that we may preserve a consistency in the several parts of it. Otherwise we shall spoil the beauty and acceptance of many an honest, and, perhaps in the main, prudent attempt; or by a train of unthought-of consequences, shall demolish with the one hand, what we are labouring to build up with the other.

This is a remark which we shall have frequent occasion to recollect; and it is of peculiar importance in the business of education. It is therefore necessary, that having before described the way in which children are to be trained up, and urged you to a diligent application to the duty, I now proceed:

Thirdly, to offer some advices for your assistance in this attempt, of leading children into, and conducting them in this way.

These will relate—partly to the manner in which the attempt is to be made,—and partly to the precautions necessary for rendering it effectual: Which are, as you see, matters of distinct consideration, though comprehended under the general head of directions.

I. As to the manner in which the attempt is to be made.

And here it is evident, it should be done plainly,—seriously,—tenderly,— and patiently.

1. Children are to be instructed plainly: In the plainest things and by the plainest words.

They are to be taught the plainest things in religion in the first place. And it is a pleasing reflection on this occasion, that according to the abundant goodness and condescension of the great God, those things which are the most necessary are the plainest. Just as in the world of nature, those kinds of food, which are most wholesome and nourishing, are also the most common. We should shew our grateful sense of the divine goodness in this particular, by our care to imitate it; and should see to it, that when the necessities of our *children require bread*, we *do not give them a stone*, or chaff; as we should do, if we were to distract their feeble minds with a variety of human schemes, and *doubtful disputations*. The more abstruse and mysterious truths of the gospel are gradually to be unfolded as they are exhibited in the oracles of God and to be taught in the language of the spirit; according to the excellent advice of the great Dr. Owen*, "making scripture phraseology our rule and pattern in the declaration of spiritual things." But we must not begin here. We must feed them with *milk* while they are babes, and reserve the *strong meat* for a *maturer age*†. Take the most obvious and vital truths of christianity. Tell them, that they are creatures, and sinful creatures; that by sin they have displeased a holy God; and that they must be pardoned, and sanctified, and accepted in Christ, or must perish for ever. Shew them the difference between sin, and holiness; between a state of nature, and of grace. Shew them that they are hastening on to death and judgment, and so must enter on heaven or hell, and dwell for ever in the one or the other. Such kind of lessons will probably turn to the best account, both to them and you. I know it is a very easy thing to inflame the warm ignorant minds of children with an eager zeal for distinguishing forms, or distinguishing phrases; and to make them violent in the interest of a party, before they know any thing of christianity. But if we thus *Sow the wind*, we shall probably *reap the whirlwind*‡; venting ourselves, and transfusing into them, a *wrath of man*, which *never works*, but often greatly obstructs, *the righteousness of God*§. Blessed be God, this is not the fault of you, my friends of this congregation. I would mention it with great thankfulness, as both your happiness and mine, that so far as I can judge, it is

* Owen on the Spirit, pref. ad fin.
† Heb. v. 13, 14. ‡ Hos. viii. 7. § Jam. i. 20.

*The sincere milk of the word that you desire**. Let it be your care to draw it out for the nourishment of your children's souls, as their understandings and capacities will permit them to take it in.

And while you are teaching them the plainest things endeavour to do it in the plainest words. It is the gracious method which God uses with us, who speaks to us of heavenly things in language, not fully expressive of the sublimity and grandeur of the subject, but rather suited to our feeble apprehensions. Thus our Lord taught his disciples, *As they were able to bear it*† ; and used easy and familiar similitudes, taken from the most obvious occurrences in life, to illustrate matters of the highest importance. A most instructive example ! Such condescension should we use, in training up those committed to our care, and should examine, whether we take their understandings along with us, as we go on : Otherwise we are *speaking in an unknown tongue*, and as the apostle expresses it, are *barbarians unto them*‡ be our language ever so graceful, elegant, or pathetic§.

Give me leave to add, for the conclusion of this head, that though it is to be taken for granted, that children in their earliest infancy are to be engaged to what is good, and to be restrained from evil, chiefly, by a view to rewards and punishments, more immediate or remote, or by some natural workings of a benevolent affection, which are by all means to be cherished and cultivated ; yet, as they may grow up to greater ripeness of understanding, something further is to be attempted. It must then be our care, to set before them, in the strongest light, the natural *beauties of holiness*, and deformities of sin ; and likewise to propose, in the easiest and most familiar way the evidences of the truth of christianity, that they may be fortified against those temptations to infidelity, with which the present age does so unhappily abound. The external evidences of it are by no means to be slighted, such as the credibility of the gospel history, the accomplishment of prophecies, the unity of design carried on by so many different persons in distant ages and countries, its amazing and even miraculous propagation in the world ; all which, with many other considerations to the same purpose, are very judiciously handled in a variety of excellent writings of our own age ; of which I know not any more suited to your use, than Mr. Bennet's Discourses on the Inspiration of Scripture, which I therefore recommend to your attentive peru-

* 1 Pet. ii. 2. † Mark iv. 33. ‡ 1 Cor. xiv. 11.

* Mercator renders על מ דרבו juxta mensuram viæ ejus, i. e. pro captu ingenii ejus infirmioris.

sal; and with them Dr. Watts's Sermons on the Inward Witness to the Truth of Christianity from its efficacious tendency to promote holiness: This appears to me the noblest evidence of all, and will to those, who have actually experienced it, be an *anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast.*

2. Children should be instructed in a very serious manner.

There is an unhappy proneness in our degenerate natures to trifle with the things of God; and the giddiness of childhood is peculiarly subject to it. Great care should therefore be taken, that we do not encourage such a humour, nor teach them, by our levity or indolence in the manner of instruction, to take the awful name of God in vain, while they are speaking of him, or to him. For this purpose we must labour with our own hearts, to work them to a deep and serious sense of the truth and importance of what we say: This will give us an unaffected solemnity in speaking, which will probably command the attention, and impress the hearts of our children. Endeavour to preserve on your own spirit an habitual awe of the great and blessed God, the Lord of heaven and earth; that when you speak of him to those little creatures, they may evidently see the indications of the humblest veneration and reverence, and so may learn to *Fear him from their youth**. When you speak of Christ, let your souls be bowing to him as the Son of God, through whom alone you and yours can obtain pardon and life; and let them be overflowing with love to him, for his unutterable and inconceivable grace. And when you remind them of death, judgment and eternity, consider yourselves and them as dying creatures: Think in how few months, or weeks, or days, your lips may be silent in the dust, or they may be for ever removed beyond the reach of your instructions; and plead with them in as earnest and importunate a manner, as if the salvation of their immortal souls depended on the effect of the present address. Again,

3. Children should be instructed in a very tender and affectionate manner.

We should take care to let them see, that we do not desire to terrify and amaze them, to lead them into unnecessary severities, or to deprive them of any innocent pleasures; that what we say is not dictated by an ostentation of our own wisdom and authority; but that it all proceeds from a hearty love to them,

* 1 Kings xviii. 12.

and an earnest desire of their happiness. Study therefore to address them in the most endearing language, as well as with the softest and sweetest arguments. Endeavour, according to the practice of Solomon, *To find out acceptable words**. And if tears should rise while you are speaking, do not suppress them. There is a language in them, which may perhaps affect beyond words. A weeping parent is both an awful, and a melting sight.

Endeavour therefore to look upon your children in such a view, as may be most likely to awaken these tender sentiments. Consider them as creatures whom you (as instruments) have brought into being, tainted with innate corruption, surrounded with snares, and, on the whole, in such apparent danger, that if not snatched as brands out of the burning, they must perish for ever. And that your hearts may be further mollified, and you may be formed to the most gentle and moving manner of address, let me intreat you to study the scripture in this view, and to observe the condescending and endearing forms in which the blessed God speaks to us there. Observe them for yourselves, and point them out to your children. Tell them, how kindly he has demanded, how graciously he has encouraged their services; while he says, *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth*†; and elsewhere, *I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me*‡. Tell them, that the Lord Jesus Christ hath invited them to come to him; for he hath said, *Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*§: *Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out*‖: *And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely*¶. Such scriptures as these should be often repeated to them, and should be early inculcated on their memory, with an attempt, as far as possible, to let them into the spirit and force of them.

Nor will it be improper sometimes to set before them, how much you have done, how much you are ready to do for them; how many anxious thoughts you entertain, how many fervent prayers you offer on their account. Thus Lemuel's mother addressed him, *What my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows*** ? As if she had said, "My dear child, for whom I have borne so much, for whom I have prayed so earnestly; in what words shall I address thee, to express what my heart feels on thy account? How shall I speak my

* Eccles. xii. 10. † Eccles. xii. 1. ‡ Prov. viii. 17. § Mat. xi. 28.
‖ John vi. 37. ¶ Rev. xxii. 17. ** Prov. xxxi. 2.

affectionate overflowing concern for thy happiness both in time and eternity?" So Solomon pleads, *My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine* :* As if he should have said, "Think how much is comprehended in that argument, that a parent's happiness is in great measure to be determined by thy character and conduct." And the apostle Paul lays open his heart to the Galatians in those pathetical words, *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, till Christ be formed in you†.* Yet these were, comparatively, strangers to him. And should not you, my friends, feel, should not you express, an equal tenderness for those, who are so nearly allied to you in the bonds of nature, for those who are indeed parts of yourselves? But further,

4. Children should also be instructed patiently.

You know, when the husbandman has committed the seed to the ground, he patiently expects the fruit of his labours. So must ministers, when instructing their people: So must parents, when instructing their children. You must not imagine, my friends, that a plentiful harvest will spring up in a day. The growth of nature is slow, and by insensible degrees: Nor are you to wonder, if advances in knowledge and grace be still slower. Be upon your guard therefore against fretfulness and impatience. Your children will forget what you have once taught them; repeat it a second time; and if they forget it the second time, repeat it the third. It is thus that the great God deals with you; and you have daily reason to rejoice that he does. He knows the frailty and weakness of your minds and therefore acts by a rule, which seems to be laid down with a peculiar regard to the very point I am urging: *Whom shall he teach knowledge, and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts? for precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, and line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little‡ :* As if he should have said, "God has treated you like little children, who must have the same short easy lesson repeated again and again." And is it not indeed thus with regard to you? Does not the patience and condescension of your heavenly Father send to you his ministers sabbath after sabbath, frequently inculcating the same things, that what you have forgot may be brought to mind again? Thus should you do by those committed to your care.

* Prov. xxiii. 15. † Gal. iv. 19. ‡ Isai. xxviii. 9, 10.

Be teaching them every sabbath: That is remarkably a good day for the purpose. Then you have leisure for it; then you have peculiar advantage to pursue the work; then you are furnished with some new matter by what you have heard in public; and I would hope, your spirits are then quickened by it, so that you can speak *Out of the abundance of your heart;* and you may, by discoursing with them on what has been addressed to you, revive the impression on your own souls.

I add: Be teaching them every day, by occasional discourses, when you have not an opportunity of doing it by stated addresses. Drop a word for God every day and often in a day. You will probably find your account in it, and your children theirs. A sudden glance of thought towards God in the midst of the world is often a great refreshment to the christian; and a sudden turn to something serious and spiritual in conversation, is frequently very edifying to others. It strikes the memory and the heart, and is, perhaps, *As a nail fixed in a sure place**, when many a solemn admonition, and many an elaborate sermon is lost. It is with pleasure that I frequently hear good christians speaking of such occasional hints, which have been dropped by saints of the former generation: Those transient passages, which the pious parents might forget in a few moments, their children have distinctly remembered for many future years, and repeated for their own edification, and I might add for mine. Let this therefore be an encouragement to you; and in this respect, *In the morning sow* this precious *seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand,* since you *know not whether you shall prosper, or whether both shall be alike good*†.

Once more, let me intreat you to repeat your pious instructions and admonitions, even though your children should grow up to years of maturity, without appearing to profit by them. Say not, that you can teach them no more than they already know; or, that you can try no new methods which you have not already attempted. You see, that in your assemblies God often brings back souls to himself, by setting home on the conscience truths, which, with regard to the speculative part of them, they know as well as their teachers; and adds a divine efficacy to those institutions, which, for a long succession of years, they had attended in vain. *Be not* therefore *weary in well-doing*‡; but *Let patience,* in this instance, *have its perfect work*§:

Thus let your children be instructed plainly, seriously,

* Isai. xxii. 23. † Eccles. xi. 6. ‡ Gal. vi. 9. § Jam. i. 4.

tenderly, and patiently; I wave some other particulars, which I might have added to these, concerning the manner of instructing them, because I apprehend they will more properly fall under the second branch of these directions: Where I am further to advise you,

II. As to the precautions you must use, if you desire that these attempts in the religious education of your children may be attended with success.

Here I would particularly advise,—that a prudent care be taken to keep up your authority over them,—and at the same time to engage their affections to you; that you may be solicitous to keep them out of the way of temptation;—that you confirm your admonitions by a suitable example;—that you cheerfully accept of proper assistances in this important attempt;—and that you humbly and constantly look up to God for his blessing on all.

1. If we desire to succeed in our attempts for the religious education of our children, we must take care to keep up our authority over them.

To this purpose, we must avoid, not only what is grossly vicious and criminal, (which will more properly be mentioned under a following head,) but also those little levities and follies which might make us appear contemptible to them. Whatever liberties we may take with those who are our equals in age and station, a more exact decorum is to be preserved before our children. Thus we are to reverence them, if we desire they should reverence us*; for, as Dr. Tillotson very justly observes, "there is a certain freedom of conversation, which is only proper amongst equals in age and quality, which if we use before our superiors we seem to despise them, and if we do it before our inferiors, we teach them to despise us†."

I will not insist on this hint, which your own prudence must accommodate to particular circumstances, but shall here introduce the mention of correction, which, in some cases, may be absolutely necessary to the support of parental authority, especially where admonitions and counsels are slighted.

You know, that the scriptures expressly require it on proper occasions; and Solomon, in particular, enlarges on the head, and suggests some important thoughts with regard to it.

* Maxima debetur puero reverentia.———JUVEN. Sat. xiv. v. 47.

† Tillotson's Serm. vol. 1. p. 541.

Foolishness, says he, *is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it from him**. Nay, he speaks of it as a matter in which life is concerned, even the life of the soul: *Withhold not correction from a child; for if thou beat him with the rod, he shall not die: Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from hell*†. And is it kindness, or cruelty, in a parent, to spare the flesh to the hazard of the soul? Parents are therefore exhorted to an early care in this respect, lest vicious habits growing inveterate should render the attempt vain or hurtful; and they are cautioned against that foolish tenderness, which would lead them to regard the tears of a child, rather than his truest and highest interest. *Correct thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying*‡: *He that spareth the rod, hateth his son: but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes*§. Nor can we imagine a more lively commentary on the words than the melancholy story of Eli, who, though he was a very eminent saint in a degenerate age, yet erred here, and by a fatal indulgence, brought ruin, as well as infamy, on himself and family. He reproved the abominable wickedness of his son; but did not make use of those severe methods, which, in such a case, the authority of a parent might have warranted, and the office of judge did undoubtedly require. Observe the sentence which God pronounced against him for it, and which he executed upon him in a very awful manner. *The Lord said unto Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle: In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him, that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not: And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever*‖. Take heed, I intreat you, as you love your children, as you love yourselves, that it may not be said of you, that yours have made themselves vile, and you have neglected to restrain them. Let mothers, in particular, take heed, that they do not, as it were, smother their children in their embraces; as a French author smartly expresses it¶. And let me remind you all particularly to be

* Prov. xxii. 15. † Prov. xxiii. 13, 14. ‡ Prov. xix. 18.
§ Prov. xiii. 24. ‖ 1 Sam. iii. 11—14.
¶ Superville, Serm. vol. iii. p. 374.

cautious that the arms of one parent, be not a refuge to the children from the resentment of the other. Both should appear to act in concert, or the authority of the one will be despised, and probably the indulgence of the other abused, and the mutual affection of both endangered.

I cannnot say, that I enlarge on this subject with pleasure; but how could I have answered for the omission of what is so copiously and so pathetically inculcated in the sacred writings? It is indeed probable, that the rugged and servile temper of the generality of the jewish nation might render a severe discipline peculiarly necessary for their children; yet I fear, there are few of our families, where every thing of this kind can safely be neglected. But, after all, I would by no means drive matters to extremities; and therefore cannot persuade myself to dismiss this head without a caution or two. Take heed—that your corrections be not too frequent,—or too severe,—and that they be not given in an unbecoming manner.

If your corrections be too frequent, it will probably spoil much of the success. Your children, like iron, will harden under repeated strokes; and that ingenuous shame will be gradually worn off, which adds the greatest sting to what they suffer from a parent's hand. And there will be this farther inconvenience attending it, that there will not be a due difference made, between great and small faults. The laws of Draco the Athenian were justly rejected, because they punished all crimes alike, and made the stealing of an apple capital, as well as the murder of a citizen. You, on the contrary, should let your children see, that you know how to distinguish between indiscretion and wickedness; and should yourselves appear most displeased, where you have reason to believe that God is so.

Nor should your corrections at any time be too severe. It is very prettily said by Dr. Tillotson on this occasion, "that whips are not the cords of a man:" They should be used in a family, only as the sword in a republic as the last remedy, when all others have been tried in vain; and then should be so used, as that we may appear to imitate the compassion of our heavenly Father, who *Doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men**.

Which leads me to add, that we should be greatly cautious that correction be not inflicted in an unbecoming manner: And it always is so, when it is given in a passion. A parent's correcting his child should be regarded as an act of domestic

* Lam. iii. 33.

justice, which therefore should be administered with a due solemnity and decorum; and to behave otherwise on the occasion, is almost as great an indecency, as for a judge to pass sentence in a rage. It is injurious to ourselves, as it tends to spoil our own temper; for peevishness and passion will grow upon us, by being indulged towards those who dare not oppose them: And it is on many accounts injurious to our children. Solomon intimates, that correction and instruction should be joined, when he says, *The rod and reproof give wisdom**. But what room is there for the still voice of wisdom to be heard in a storm of fury? If your children see, that you act calmly and mildly; if they read parental tenderness in your heart, through an awful frown of your brow; if they perceive that correction is your strange work, a violence which you offer to yourselves from a principle of duty to God and affection to them; they must be obdurate indeed, if they do not receive it with reverence and love; for this is both a venerable and an amiable character. But if once they imagine, that you chastise them merely to vent your passion, and gratify your resentments, they will secretly despise, and perhaps hate you for it: In that instance at least, they will look upon you as their enemies, and may by a continued course of such severities contract an aversion, not only to you, but to all that you recommend to them. Thus you may lose your authority and your influence, by the very method you take to support it, and may turn a wholesome, though bitter medicine, into poison. But I hope and trust, that your humanity and your prudence will concur to prevent so fatal an abuse.

2. If you desire success in your attempts for the education of your children, you must be careful to secure their affection to you.

Our Lord observes, that *If any man love him, he will keep his word*†; and the assertion is applicable to the present case: The more your children love you, the more will they regard your instructions and admonitions. God has indeed made it their duty to love you, and the most indispensible laws of gratitude require it; yet since so many children are evidently wanting in filial affection, it is certain that all this may not secure it in yours, unless you add a tender obliging behaviour, to all the other benefits you have conferred upon them. I observed, under a former head, that you should address them in

* Prov. xxix. 15. † John xiv. 23.

an affectionate manner when discoursing on religious subjects; but now I add, that you should carry the temper through life, and be daily endeavouring to render yourselves amiable to them. The apostle cautions parents, that they should not *Provoke their children to wrath**, if they would *bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord:* On the contrary, you should put on the kindest looks, you should use the most endearing and condescending language; you should overlook many little failings, and express a high complacency in what is really regular and laudable in their behaviour. And though you must sometimes over-rule their desires, when impatiently eager, yet far from delighting generally to cross them, you should rather study their inclinations, that you may surprise them with unexpected favours. Thus will they learn quietly to refer themselves to your care, and will more easily submit to mortification and denial, when it is not made necessary by clamorous and impetuous demands. On the whole, you should endeavour to behave so, as that your children may love your company, and of choice be much in it; which will preserve them from innumerable snares, and may furnish you with many opportunities of forming their temper and behaviour, by imperceptible degrees, to what may be decent, amiable, and excellent†.

If you manage these things with prudence, you need not fear that such condescensions, as I have now recommended, will impair your authority; far from that, they will rather establish it. The superiority of your parental character may be maintained in the midst of these indulgences; and when it is thus attempered, it is most like to produce that mixture of reverence and love, by which the obedience of a child is to be distinguished from that of a slave.

3. You must be solicitous to keep your children out of the way of temptation, if you would see the success of your care in their education.

If you are not on your guard here, you will probably throw down what you have built, and build up that which you have been endeavouring to destroy. An early care must be taken, to keep them from the occasions, and the very appearances of evil. We should not venture their infant-steps on the brink of a precipice, on which grown persons, who know how

* Eph. vi. 4.

† In Parentibus vero quam plurimum esse educationis optaverim.—QUINTIL. ubi supra.

to adjust the poise of their bodies, may walk without extreme danger. More hazardous might it be, to allow them to trifle with temptations, and boldly to venture to the utmost limits of that which is lawful. An early tenderness of conscience may be a great preservative: and the excess of strictness, though no excess be desirable, may prove much safer than an excess of liberty.

Bad company is undoubtedly one of the most formidable and pernicious entanglements. By forming friendships with persons of a vicious character, many a hopeful youth has learnt their ways, and found a fatal snare to his soul*. You should be very watchful to prevent their contracting such dangerous friendships; and where you discover any thing of that kind, should endeavour, by all gentle and endearing methods, to draw them off from them; but if they still persist, you must resolve to cut the knot you cannot untie, and let your children know, they must either renounce their associates, or their parents. One resolute step of this kind might have prevented the ruin of multitudes, who have fallen a sacrifice to the importunities of wicked companions, and the weak indulgence of imprudent parents; who have contented themselves with blaming, what they ought strenuously to have redressed.

All bad company is, in this respect, formidable; but that is most evidently so, which is to be found at home. Great care ought therefore to be taken, that you admit none into your families, who may debauch the tender minds of your children, by pernicious opinions, or by vicious practices†. This is a caution which should be particularly remembered, in the case of servants. Take heed you do not bring into your families such as may diffuse infection through the souls of your dear offspring. It is a thousand times better to put up with some inconveniences and disadvantages, when you have reason to believe a servant fears God, and will, from a principle of conscience, be faithful in watching over your children, and a seconding your religious care in their education; than to prefer such, as while they are, perhaps managing your temporal affairs something better, may pervert your children to the service of the devil. I fear, some parents little think, how much secret mischief these base creatures are doing. And it is very possible, that if some of you recollect what you may have observed

* Prov. xxii. 25.

† Nil dictu fœdum, visuque, hæc limina tangat,
Intra quæ puer est.——Juv. Sat. xiv. v. 44, 45.

amongst the companions of your childhood, you may find instances of this nature, which riper years have not since given you opportunity to discover. See to it therefore, that you be diligently on your guard here.

Again: If you send your children to places of education, be greatly cautious in your choice of them. Dearly will you purchase the greatest advantages for learning, at the expence of those of a religious nature. And I will turn out of my way to add, that school-masters and tutors will have a dreadful account to give, if they are not faithfully and tenderly solicitous for the souls of those committed to their care. The Lord pardon our many defects here, and quicken us to greater diligence and zeal! But to return:

Give me leave only to add, that it is of the highest importance, if you would not have all your labour in the education of your children lost, that you should be greatly cautious with regard to their settlement in the world. Apprenticeships and marriages, into irreligious families, have been the known sources of innumerable evils. They who have exposed the souls of their children, to apparent danger, for the sake of some secular advantages, have often lived to see them drawn aside to practices ruinous to their temporal, as well as their eternal interests. Thus their *Own iniquity* hath remarkably *corrected them**: And I heartily pray, that *The God of this world* may never be permitted thus to *blind your eyes*†; but that you, my friends, may learn, from the calamities of other families, that wholesome lesson, which, if you neglect it, others may perhaps hereafter learn from the ruin of yours.

4. See to it, that you confirm your admonitions by a suitable example, if you desire, on the whole, that they should prove useful to your children.

A consciousness of the irregularity of our own behaviour, in any remarkable instances which may fall under their observation, will probably abate much of that force and authority with which we might otherwise address them‡. When we know they may justly retort upon us, at least in their minds, those words of the apostle, *Thou that teacheth another, teachest thou not thyself*§? surely a sense of guilt and of shame must either

* Jer. ii. 19. † 2 Cor. iv. 4.

‡ Unde tibi Frontem Libertatemque Parentis,
Cum facis pejora Senex?——Juv. Sat. xiv. v. 56, 57.

§ Rom. ii. 21.

entirely silence us, or at least impair that freedom and confidence with which we might otherwise have exhorted and rebuked.

Or had we so much composure and assurance, as to put on all the forms of innocence and virtue, could we expect regard, when our actions contradicted our discourses, or hope they should reverence instructions, which their teachers themselves appear to despise? It is in the general true, that there is a silent, but powerful oratory in example, beyond the force of the most elegant and expressive words; and the example of parents has often a peculiar weight with their children*; which seems to be alluded to in that exhortation of St. Paul, *Be ye followers* (or imitators) *of God, as dear children*†. So that on the whole, as a very celebrated writer well expresses it‡, "To give children good instruction, and a bad example, is but beckoning to them with the head to shew them the way to heaven, while we take them by the hand, and lead them in the way to hell." We should therefore most heartily concur in David's resolution, as ever we hope our families should be religious and happy: *I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way; I will walk within my house with a perfect heart*§.

5. Cheerfully accept of all proper assistances in the education of your children, if you desire it may succeed well.

It will be your wisdom to accept of the assistance, which may be offered, either from books or friends.

Books may in this respect be very useful to you: the book of God above all; both to furnish you with materials for this great work, and instruct you in the manner of performing it. Other writings may be subservient to this purpose. Wise and pious treatises on the subject of education, may be read with great pleasure and advantage; and you may receive singular assistance from those catechisms, and prayers, and songs for children, with which most of your families are now furnished, through the condescension of one valuable friend‖ in writing them, and the generosity of another in bestowing them upon us. I hope you will express your thankfulness to both, by a diligent care to use them; and I persuade myself, that you and yours may abundantly find your account in them; for while the language is so plain and easy, that even an infant may un-

* ————Velocius & citius nos
Corrumpunt vitiorum Exempla domestica, magnis
Cum subeunt animos Auctoribus.——Juv. Sat. xiv. v. 31—33.

† Eph. v. 1. ‡ Tillotson, vol. 1. p. 531. § Psal. ci. 2. ‖ Dr. Isaac Watts.

derstand it, you will often find, not only a propriety, but a strength and sublimity in the sentiments, which may be improving to persons of advanced capacities. There is much of that milk, by which strong men may be entertained and nourished.

I add, that in this important work, you should gladly embrace the assistance of pious and prudent friends. I can by no means approve that Lacedemonian law, which gave every citizen a power of correcting his neighbour's children, and made it infamous for the parent to complain of it: Yet we must all allow, that considering the great importance of education, a concern for the happiness of families and the public will require a mutual watchfulness over each other in this respect; nor is there any imaginable reason to exclude this from the number of those heads, on which we are to *Admonish one another**, and to *Consider each other, to provoke unto good works*†.

Nothing seems more evident than this; and one would suppose, that persons who are acquainted with human nature, should suspect, that self-love might work under this form, and that they might be a little blinded by a partial affection to their offspring. Such a reflection might engage them at least patiently, or rather thankfully, to hear the sentiments, and receive the admonitions of their friends on this head But instead of this, there is in many people a kind of parental pride, if I may be allowed the expression, which seldom fails to exert itself on such an occasion. They are so confident in their own way, and do so magisterially despise the opinion of others, that one would almost imagine, they took it for granted, that with every child, nature has given to the parent, a certain stock of infallible wisdom for the management of it; or that, if they thought otherwise, they rather chose their children should be ruined by their own conduct, than saved by any foreign advice. If this arrogance only rendered the parents ridiculous, one should not need to be greatly concerned about it; especially as their high complacency in themselves would make them easy whatever others might think or say of them: But when we consider the unhappy consequences it may produce, with regard to the temper and conduct of the rising generation, it will appear a very serious evil, well worthy a particular mention, and a particular care to guard against it.

* Col. iii. 16. † Heb. x. 24.

As for the assistance of ministers in this work of education I persuade myself, you will be so wise as thankfully to embrace it, both in public and private; and let me urge you to improve it to the utmost. Accustom your children to an early constancy and seriousness in attending divine ordinances, and be often yourselves enquiring, and give us leave sometimes to enquire, how they advance in acquaintance with religion, and in love to it. And more particularly let them attend on our catechetical lectures, which are peculiarly intended for their service.

I bless God, I have seen the happy effects of this exercise, both in the places where I was educated whilst a child*, and in those where I was formerly fixed; and as I am now introducing it amongst you, with an intent to continue it as long as I am capable of public service, I promise myself your most hearty concurrence in it. I will not at large insist on the advantages which may attend it. You easily see, that it will be an engagement to the children to learn those excellent summaries of divine truth, when their progress in them is so often examined: By repeating it themselves, and hearing it rehearsed by others, it will be more deeply fixed upon their memories: The exposition of it, in a plain and familiar manner may much improve their understandings in the doctrines and duties of religion: And I will add, you that are parents may, by attending on these occasions, possibly learn something as to the way of opening and explaining things, which you may successfully practice at home. In consequence of all we may hope, that, by the divine blessing some good impressions may be made on the minds of children. And when they find a minister willing to take pains to instruct them, when they hear him seriously and tenderly pleading with them, and pleading with God for them, it may much engage their affections to him, and so promote his usefulness amongst them, in other ordinances, and in future years. And give me leave to say upon this head, that as no wise and good minister will think it beneath him, to desire the affection of the children of his congregation; so it is the duty of parents to cherish in their offspring, sentiments of respect and love to all the faithful ministers of Christ, and especially towards those

* Kingston, and St. Albans. On the mention of which, I cannot forbear returning my public thanks to my reverend and worthy friends Mr. Mayo and Mr. Clark, for the many excellent instructions they gave me, both in public and private, when under their ministerial care in the years of childhood. As I would always retain a grateful and affectionate remembrance of it, I cannot but pray, that the like care may be as much the practice, as it is the duty of their brethren of every denomination.

who statedly labour amongst them. Whatever mistakes you may discover in our conduct, or whatever deficiencies in our public ministrations, you should study to conceal them from the notice of your children; lest they should grow up in a contempt of those, whose services might otherwise be highly advantageous to them.

6. Lastly, Be earnest in prayer to God for his blessing on your attempts in the education of your children, if you desire to see them successful.

This I would leave with you as my last advice; and though I have had frequent occasion to hint at it before, I would now more particularly urge it on your attentive regard. God is the author of *Every good and every perfect gift** ; it is he, that has formed the mind and the tongue, and that *Teaches man knowledge* and address†. On him therefore must you fix your dependence, to teach you so to conceive of divine things, and so to express your conceptions of them, as may be most suited to the capacities, the dispositions, and the circumstances of your children; and to him you must look to *Teach them to profit* by all‡, by his almighty grace to *open their ear unto discipline*§, and to *bow their heart unto understanding*‖.

A heathen poet could teach the Romans, in a form of public and solemn devotion, to look up to heaven for influences from thence, to form their youth to the love and practice of virtue¶. Surely you, my friends, are under much greater obligations to do it, and that in a christian manner; earnestly intreating the God of grace, to send down on your rising offspring the effusions of that blessed Spirit, which was purchased by the blood of Christ, and is deposited in his compassionate hand. *If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious***, you are daily living on those supplies; let it be your constant errand at the throne of grace, to plead for your children there. Wrestle with God in secret, for the life of their souls, and for those regenerating influences on which it depends; and in those family devotions, which I hope you dare not neglect, let the little ones, from their earliest infancy, have a share in your remembrance. You may humbly hope, that he, by whose encouragement and command you pray, will not suffer these supplications to be *like water spilt upon the ground:* And, in the nature of things,

* Jam. i. 17. † Psal. xciv. 10. ‡ Isa. xlviii. 17. § Job xxxvi. 10. ‖ Prov. ii. 2.
¶ Dii bonos Mores docili Juventæ
Date.——Hor. Car. Sæc. ver. 45, 46.
** 1 Pet. ii. 3.

it may tend to make serious impressions on the minds of your children, to hear their own case mentioned in prayer, and may dispose them with greater regard, to attend on what you say to them, when they find you so frequently, so solemnly, and so tenderly pleading with God for them.

Doubt not that every faithful minister of Christ will most heartily concur with you, in so great and necessary a request. May God return to our united addresses an answer of peace! May he *Pour out his Spirit on our seed, and his blessing on* our *offspring* that they *may grow up* before him *as willows by the water-courses** ; that they may be to their parents for a comfort, to the church for a support, and to our God for *a name and a praise!* Amen.

* Isai. xliv. 3, 4.

SERMON IV.

ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

An Address to different Relations, &c.

Prov. xxii. 6.——*Train up a Child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

IN treating on this subject of education, I have all along endeavoured, according to my usual manner, to make my discourses as practical as I could. While I was describing, and recommending the way, and offering my advices, with regard to the manner of conducting children into it, most of what I said under those generals was an application to you. I have therefore left myself the less to do here; yet I was not willing to conclude my discourses on a subject, which it is probable I shall never so largely resume, without

Fourthly, A particular address to my hearers, according to your different relations, and characters in life.

This I promised as my fourth and last general, and I enter on it without farther preface; humbly begging, that God, who has so intimate an access to all our hearts, would enable me to speak in the most awakening and edifying manner; and that he would, by his blessed Spirit, apply it to your consciences, that it may be *As a nail fastened in a sure place**; that hearing and *knowing these things* for yourselves, you may *Hear and know them for your good*†.

I would here particularly address myself,—first to parents,—then to children, and—in the last place, to those young persons who are grown up to years of maturity, but not yet fixed in families of their own.

I. Let me address my discourse to those of you that are parents; whether you have been negligent of the duties I have now been urging, or through grace, have been careful in the discharge of them.

1. To those who have been grossly negligent in this important care.

* Isa. xxii. 23. † Job v. 27. text and margin.

I have here one advantage not common to every subject; I mean, that the guilty will immediately know themselves. When we apply ourselves in general to unconverted sinners, ignorance of the nature of true religion, a neglect of conversing with your own souls, or the insinuating prejudices of self-love, may disguise the true state of the case, and teach people to speak peace to themselves, under the most awful denunciations of wrath and vengeance. But here, one would imagine, that the recollection of a few moments might be sufficient to determine the case; because the question relates to past fact, and that not merely to one particular action, but to a long train and succession of labours and attempts.

Now let your consciences witness, whether I am guilty of a breach of charity, when I take it for granted, that there are some amongst you, who have been, and are very negligent of the duty I have now been enforcing? You have probably contented yourselves with teaching your children to read, and setting them to learn, like parrots, a prayer, and perhaps too, a catechism and a creed. But I appeal to your consciences, have you from the very day of their birth to this time, ever spent one hour in seriously instructing them in the knowledge of God, and endeavouring to form them to his fear and service; in setting before them the misery of their natural condition, and urging them to apply to Christ for life and salvation; in representing the solemnities of death, and judgment, and the eternal world, and urging an immediate and diligent preparation for them? Where is the time, where the place, that can witness, that you have been pouring out your souls before God on their account, and wrestling with him for their lives, as knowing they must perish for ever, without the righteousness of his Son, and the grace of his Spirit? Where, or when, have you thus prayed with them, or for them? What sermon have you heard, what scripture have you read, with this thought, "This will I carry to my children, and communicate to them as the food of their souls?" I fear there are several of you that have been so far from doing it, that you have hardly ever seriously thought of it as a thing to be done.

And I would ask, Why have you not thought of it, and why have you not done it? Are these creatures that you have produced, like the other animals of your houses or your field, mere animated systems of flesh and blood, made to take a turn in life for a few days and months, and then to sink into everlasting forgetfulness? Or are they rational and immortal creatures, that must exist for ever in heaven or in hell? This is not a matter of

doubt with you; and yet you behave, as if the very contrary to what you believe were evident certain truth. In short, it is the most barbarous part you act, and more like that of an enemy than a parent.

It is not that you are insensible of the workings of parental tenderness. No, far from that, it may perhaps sometimes rise to a weak and criminal dotage; yet I repeat it again, you are acting a hostile and barbarous part. You are greatly solicitous for their temporal happiness. For this you labour and watch; for this you deny yourselves many an enjoyment, and subject yourselves to many an uneasy circumstance: But, alas! Sirs, where is the real friendship of all this, while the precious soul is neglected? Your children are born with a corrupted nature, perverted by sinful examples, ignorant of God, in a state of growing enmity to him, and, in consequence of all, exposed to his wrath and curse, and in the way to everlasting ruin: In the mean time it is your great care, that they may pass through this precarious, momentary life, in ease and pleasure, perhaps in abundance and grandeur; that is, in such circumstances, as will probably lull them into a forgetfulness of their danger, till there be no more hope. How cruel a kindness!

It brings to my mind the account which an ancient writer* gives of the old Carthaginians, which I can never recollect without great emotion. He is speaking of that diabolical custom which so long prevailed amongst them, of offering their children to a detestable idol, which was formed in such a manner, that an infant put into its hands, which were stretched out to receive it, would immediately fall into a gulph of fire†. He adds a circumstance, which one cannot mention without horror; that the mothers, who with their own hands presented the little innocents, thought it an unfortunate omen that the victim should be offered weeping; and therefore used a great many fond artifices to divert it, that soothed by the kisses and caresses of a parent, it might smile in the dreadful moment in which it was to be given up to the idol§. Pardon me, my friends; such is your parental care and love; such your concern for the present ease and prosperity of your children, while their souls are neglected: A fond solicitude, that they may pass smiling into the hands of the destroyer.

* Minutius Felix.

† Diodor. Sic. lib. xx. cap. 14. Euseb Præp Evang. lib. iv. cap. 7.

§ Blanditiis & Osculis comprimente Vagitum, ne flebilis Hostia immoletur, Minut. Fel. Octav. §. 30. page 57. Tertull. Apol. cap. ix.

You know with what just severity God reckons with the Israelites for their abominable wickedness, in *Taking his sons and his daughters*, for so he calls the children of his professing people, *and sacrificing them to be devoured**: And can you suppose, he will take no notice of the unnatural neglect of yours? Not to endeavour to save, is to destroy; and is it a little guilt, when an immortal soul is in question? You probably remember those terrible words in Ezekiel; (may they be deeply inscribed on the hearts of all whom they concern!) *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel, therefore hear thou the word from my mouth, and give them warning from me;—and if thou speakest not to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand*†. If ever you read this passage with attention, you must own it is exceedingly awful, and must be ready to say, "The Lord be merciful to ministers! They have a solèmn account to give." Indeed they have; and we thank you, if you ever bestow a compassionate thought and prayer upon us. But permit me to remind you, that though it be our case, it is not ours alone; you have likewise your share in it. Your children are much more immediately committed to your care, than you and they are committed to ours; and, by all parity of reason if they perish in their iniquities, while you neglect to give them warning, their blood will be required at your hand.

And when God comes to make inquisition for that blood, how will you be able to endure it? That awful day will open upon you, and the tribunal of God, in all its terrors, will stand unveiled before you. Give me leave to direct your eyes to it in this distant prospect, while there is yet room to mitigate those terrors. If you go on in this cruel negligence of the souls of your children, how will you dare to meet them at that judgment-seat? How will you be able to answer the great Father of spirits, when expostulating with you on account of his offspring, as well as yours, who have been betrayed and ruined by your neglect? "Inhuman creatures," may he justly say, "to whom should I have committed the care of them, rather than to you? Did they not, by my appointment, derive their being from you? Did I not implant in your hearts the natural affections of parents towards them? And to increase the obligation, did they not pass through the tender scenes of infancy and childhood in your arms, and under your eye? If you had

* Ezek. xvi. 20, 21. † Ezek. iii. 17, 18.

no compassion for their perishing souls, if you would exert no efforts for their deliverance and salvation, from whom could those compassions, those efforts have been expected? But wherein did they appear? Behold the book of my remembrance, the records of thy life, thrown open before thee! Where is the memorial of one hour spent in holy instruction, or in fervent prayer with them, or for them? Can I approve, can I acquit you on such a review? Or shall I not rather visit for these things, and *shall not my soul be avenged* for such a conduct as this?"

And your children,——will they be silent on the occasion? Did Adam in the distress and amazement of his soul, when in the presence of his judge, accuse Eve, his wife, so lately taken from his side, and committed to his protection, and still, no doubt, appearing lovely in the midst of sorrow? And will your children in that terrible day spare you? You may rather expect, they will labour to the utmost to aggravate a crime which costs them so dear, that so they may, if possible, alleviate their own guilt, or if not, indulge their revenge. "O God," may they perhaps then cry out in the most piercing accents of indignation and despair, "thou art righteous in the sentence thou passest upon us, and we justly die for our own iniquity. We have destroyed ourselves. But wilt thou not remember that our ruin is in part chargeable here? Had these our parents been faithful to thee, and to us, it had perhaps been prevented. Had our infancy been formed by religious instruction, we might not have grown up to wickedness; we might not in the advance of life, have despised thy word, and trampled on thy Son; but might this day have been owned by thee as thy children, and have risen to that inheritance of light and glory, which we now behold at this unapproachable distance. Oh! cursed be the fathers that begat us; cursed the womb that bare us; cursed the paps that gave us suck! Remember us, O Lord, whilst thou art judging them; and let us have this one wretched comfort, in the midst of all our agonies, that it is not with impunity that they have betrayed our souls!"

This is indeed shocking and diabolical language; and for that very reason, it is so much the more probable on so dreadful an occasion. And give me leave to ask you one question, my friends, and I will conclude this head. If your children were thus crying out against you in the bitterness of their souls, could you attempt to silence them, by reminding them of the care which you took of their temporal affairs, or of the riches

and grandeur in which you left them on earth? Nay, could you have the heart so much as to mention such a trifle? And if you could not, then, in the name of God, Sirs, how do you satisfy yourselves to confine all your thoughts and labours to that, which, by your own confession, will neither secure your children from everlasting destruction, nor give them one moment's relief in the review, when they are falling into it?

I will make no apology for the plainness, and earnestness, which I have used. Eternal interests are at stake, and the whole tenour of scripture supports me in what I say. I had rather you should be alarmed with hearing these things from me now, than tormented with hearing them in another manner from your children, and from God at last. If you please to take proper measures for preventing the danger, I have told you the way at large: If you do not, I hope I may say, "I am, in this respect, clear from your blood, and the blood of yours, who may perish by your means: Look you to it."

But it is high time that I proceed in my address, and apply myself,

2. To those parents, who have been careful to discharge the duty, we have so copiously described and enforced.

I cannot suppose, that any of us would pretend to maintain, that in this, or any other branch of duty, we have acted up to the utmost extent and perfection of our rule. I hope, an humble sense of the deficiences of all the best of our services, is frequently leading us to the believing views of a better righteousness than our own, in which alone we can dare to appear before a holy God, and answer the demands of his perfect law. Nevertheless, it is surely allowable to *Rejoice* in the *testimony of our conscience**, with regard to the regularity of our own behaviour, so far as it is conformable to reason and scripture; and it is an important duty thankfully to own those influences of sanctifying and strengthening *Grace, by* which *we are what we are*†.

It is with great pleasure I recollect the reason I have to believe, that many of you, christians, who hear me this day, are, in the main, conscientiously practising these duties; and that some of you were doing it long before I was capable of exhorting and directing you. Acknowledge the singular goodness of God, by which you have been excited to them, and furnished for them.

* 2 Cor. i. 12. † 1 Cor. xv. 10.

More especially have you reason to adore it, if through grace you can say, with regard to the present success, what you may certainly say, as to the future recompence, that your *Labour in the Lord is not in vain**. Let God have the glory of his own work. I persuade myself, you understand the gospel too well, to ascribe it to the prudence of your own conduct, to the strength of your reasoning, or to the warmth and tenderness of your address. Whatever of these advantages you have possessed, were derived from God; and your very care for your offspring, is, as the apostle expresses in a like case, *The earnest care which God has put into your hearts*†. But it was not this care, or these advantages alone, that produced so happy an effect. In vain had your doctrines from day to day *Dropped as the rain, and distilled as the dew*‡, in the most gentle and insinuating manner; in vain had the precious seed of the word been sown with unwearied diligence, and watered with tears too; had not God commanded the operations of his blessed Spirit to come down, as a more efficacious rain, as more fruitful showers to water their hearts. Oh! be not insensible of the favour! Your own souls might to this very day, have been a barren wilderness, a land of draught, an habitation of devils; and behold, not only they, but your families too, are like *A field*, like a garden, *which the Lord has blessed*§. God might have cut you off many years ago, for your neglect of his covenant, or your breaches of it; and behold, he is establishing it, not only with you, but *your seed after you, for an everlasting covenant*‖. Methinks your hearts should overflow with gratitude and holy joy, while you dwell on such reflections as these. This should add a relish to all the pleasure you find in conversing with your children: This should quicken you to farther diligence in cultivating those graces, which you have the satisfaction to see already implanted: This should reconcile you to all the afflictions, with which providence may exercise, either you or them: This should support you in the views of a separation, either by your own death, or by theirs; since you have so comfortable a hope, that if they are removed they will go to a heavenly Father, and that if they are left behind you, they will be safe and happy under his care till you meet in a better world, where you will be for ever to each other a mutual glory and joy.

* Cor. xv. 58. † 2 Cor. viii. 16. ‡ Deut. xxxii. 2.
§ Gen. xxvii. 27. ‖ Jer. xxxii. 39, 40.

But I cannot congratulate you on such an occasion, without the danger of adding affliction to the afflicted parents, whose circumstances, alas! are far different from yours. I fear, my friends, that there are some amongst you, who look round you, and look forwards, with far different prospects; some who are, with bleeding hearts, borrowing the complaint, which we who are ministers of the gospel, so frequently breathe forth, *We have laboured in vain, and spent our strength for nought**. "Oh!" (may you perhaps add,) "that it were only in vain! Those dear children, which we early devoted to God in baptism, which we endeavoured to educate in the knowledge and fear of the Lord, the children of our hopes, the children of our prayers, are unfruitful under all our cultivation, or, it may be, visibly turned aside from the good ways in which they were trained up; as if they had known them only to reject and affront them: So that, we have reason to fear, that all we have already done as it is an aggravation of their guilt, will be a proportionable aggravation of their ruin."

It is indeed a very pitiable case. We owe you our compassions, and we owe you our prayers; but permit us to intermix our consolations and our admonitions. You have at least *Delivered your own souls*† ; and as you participate in the sorrows of faithful ministers, you may share in their comforts too; and say with them, though the objects of our compassionate care *Be not gathered, yet shall we be glorious, for our work is with the Lord, and our reward with our God*‡. Go on therefore in the midst of all your discouragements, and, in this respect, *be not weary in well-doing*§. Take heed of such a despair, as would cut the sinews of future endeavours. If your child were labouring under any bodily distemper, you would be very unwilling that the physicians should quite give him over, and try no farther medicines: You would follow them, and say, "Can nothing more be done? Is there not the least glimmering of hope?" Alas! my friends, a child given up by a pious parent, is, to a believing eye, a much more melancholy sight, than a patient given over by the physicians. Excuse me then, if I follow you with the question, "Can nothing more be done? Is there not the least glimmering of hope?" Who told you, that the sentence of condemnation is sealed, while you are sure it is not executed. Is the danger extreme? Let your efforts be so much the more zealous, your admonitions so much the more frequent and serious, your prayers so much the more earnest and

* Isai. xlix. 4. † Ezek. xxxiii. 9. ‡ Isai. xlix. 4, 5. § Gal. vi. 9.

importunate. And, on the whole, to allude to the words of David, on a much lower occasion, *Who can tell, whether God will be gracious to* you, *that the child may live*?* And the sad apprehensions which you now entertain, may only serve to increase the joy with which you shall then say, *This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found†.*

II. I would address myself to children: To you, the dear lambs of the flock, whom I look upon as no contemptible part of my charge. I have been speaking for you a great while, and now give me leave to speak to you; and pray do you endeavour, for a few minutes, to mind every word that I say.

You see, it is your parent's duty to bring you up for God. The great God of heaven and earth has been pleased to give his express command, that you should be trained up in the way in which you should go, even *In the nurture and admonition of the Lord‡.* It is the wonderful goodness of God to give such a charge; and methinks you should be affected with it, and should be enquiring what you should do in return.

Now there are three things, which I would ask of every one of you, in return for this gracious notice which the great God has taken of you children; and I am sure, if you love your own souls, you will not deny me any of them.—Be willing to learn the things of God;—pray for them that teach you;—and see to it, you do not learn them in vain. Listen diligently, that you may understand and remember each of these.

1. Be willing to learn the things of God.

The things of God are very delightful, and they are very useful; and, whatever you may think of it, your life depends on your acquaintance with them. So Christ himself says, *This is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent§.* Therefore you, children, should not think much of the labour of learning these things. Oh! far from that, you should be every day upon your knees, begging God, that you may be taught to know him, and to know Christ. God has done a great deal more for you, than he has for many others. You might have been born in a place, where you would never have seen a bible in all your lives; where you would never have heard of the name of Christ, where you might never have been instructed in the nature of duty and sin, nor have been told of the world beyond the grave; and so would

* 2 Sam. xii. 22. † Luke xv. 24. ‡ Eph. vi. 4. § John xvii. 3.

probably have fallen into hell, before you had known there was such a place. And the great God has ordered matters so, that you are born under the light of the gospel, and have such plain and such excellent instructions, that you may know more of divine things in your infancy, than the wise men amongst the heathens did, when they were old and grey-headed, and had spent all their lives in study. And will you be so ungrateful, as not to be willing to learn, when such provision is made for your instruction? God forbid! Shall God give you his word, and your parents and ministers employ their time, and their pains, to teach you the meaning of it, and will you refuse to attend to it? That were foolish, and wicked indeed. I hope much better things of you. That is my first advice: Be willing to learn. I add,

2. Pray for those that are to teach you.

I would hope, you, little creatures, dare not live without prayer. I hope God, who sees in secret, sees many of you on your knees every morning and every evening, asking a blessing from him as your heavenly Father. Now let me intreat you, that at such times you would pray for those that instruct you in divine things; pray that God would bless them for it, and pray that he would help them in it. In praying thus for us, you do indeed pray for yourselves. There is a gracious promise to the people of God: *And they shall be all taught of God**: Pray, that it may be fulfilled. Pray, that God would teach us to teach you; else we shall attempt it to very little purpose. Pray for your parents, and pray for your ministers.

Pray for your parents: That God would help them to instruct you in such a manner as they have now been directed: That they may do it plainly, so that you may be able to understand what they say; and seriously, that you may be brought to an holy awe of God; and tenderly that you may be engaged to love God and his word, and Christ and his ways, and pray, that your parents may be stirred up to do it frequently, to give you line upon line, and precept upon precept, that you may be put in mind of what you are so ready to forget.

And let me desire you, my dear charge, when you pray for your parents, to pray for your ministers too. I declare it again in the most public manner, it is my earnest desire that children would pray for me. And I verily believe, every faithful minister of Christ would join with me in such a request. We do not, we

* John vi. 45.

dare not, despise the prayers of one of these little ones. Far from that, I am persuaded it would greatly revive and encourage us, and we should hope God had some singular mercy in store for us, and his people, if we were sure the children of the congregation were every day praying for a blessing on our labours.

3. Take heed that you do not learn in vain.

The great truths which you are taught from the word of God, are not intended merely to fill your heads with notions, but to make your hearts and lives more holy. You know the way to your father's house every step of it, but that would never carry you home, if you would not go in it. No more will it signify to know the way to heaven, unless you walk in it. *If you know these things*, says the Lord Jesus Christ himself, *happy are ye if ye do them**. And I may add, that if ye do them not, it had been happier for you, if you had never known them. Dear children, consider it; it is but a little while, and you must die: And when those active bodies of yours are become cold, mouldering clay, the great God of heaven and earth will call your souls to his judgment-seat. As sure as you are now in his house, you will shortly, very shortly, be standing before his awful throne. Then he will examine, to what purpose you have heard so many religious instructions, so many good lessons. Then he will examine, whether you have feared him, and loved him, and served him, and received the Lord Jesus into your hearts, as your Saviour and your King; whether you have chosen sin or holiness for your way, earth or heaven for your portion. And if it be found that you have lived without thought, and without prayer, without any regard to the eye of God always upon you, and the word of God always before you, it will be a most lamentable case. You will have reason to wish, you had never heard of these things at all; for he has said, *The servant which knew his Lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes*†. Even while I am speaking to you, death is coming on; perhaps his scythe may cut you down, while you are but coming up as flowers. I speak to you thus plainly and earnestly, because I do not know but you may be in eternity before another Lord's day. Oh! pray earnestly, that God would give you his grace to fit you for glory; and that all you learn may be so blessed; that you may be made *wise to salvation* by it. The Lord grant that it may!

* John xiii. 17. † Luke xii. 47.

And I have one thing to tell you for your encouragement, and then I have done with you for this time. How young soever you are, and how broken soever your prayers may be, the great and glorious Lord of angels and men, will be willing to hear what you say. You may be sure to be welcome to the throne of grace. The Lord Jesus Christ, when he was upon earth, was very angry with those who would have hindered little children from coming to him; He said, *Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God**. And Christ is as compassionate now, as ever he was. Go to him, and you may humbly hope, he will, as it were, take you up into his arms, and bless you. He hath said it, and I hope you will never forget it; *I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me*†. Oh! That I were but as sure, that every child in this assembly would go and ask a blessing from Christ, as I am that our dear Lord is willing to bestow it! But to draw to a conclusion.

III. I shall address myself to those young persons who are grown up to years of maturity, under the advantages of a religious education, and are not yet fixed in families of their own.

I hope, that many of you have been sensible of the value of those opportunities you have enjoyed, and by divine grace have been enabled to improve them well; yet I must add, that I fear, there are others amongst you, who have unhappily neglected and abused them. I must apply myself distinctly to each of you.

1. To those young persons, who have neglected and abused the advantages of a religious education.

I confess, there are hardly any to whom I speak with so little pleasure, because I have seldom less reason to hope I shall succeed. What shall I say to you? What can I say, that you have not often heard, and often despised? One is almost tempted in such a circumstance, to turn reasonings and expostulations into upbraidings; and even to adopt those too passionate words of Moses‡, "*Hear now, ye rebels*, you that have grown up in the knowledge, and yet in the contempt of divine things; you that have disappointed the hopes, and slighted the admonitions of your pious parents, and so have broken their spirits, and, it may be, their hearts too, and have brought down their *Hoary hairs with sorrow to the grave*§. One way or another you have

* Mark x. 13, 14. † Prov. viii. 17. ‡ Numb. xx. 10. § Gen xlii. 38.

perhaps silenced them. But it *Is a small thing to you, that you have* thus *wearied men*, and *will you* attempt to *weary your God also**? Can you dare to hope, that you shall at last carry those proud thoughtless heads triumphant over all the terrors of his word? You imagine it a very happy circumstance, that you have got loose from those mortifying lessons, and uneasy restraint, you were once under. But really, when one seriously considers whither these liberties lead you, and where they will probably end, a just resentment of your ingratitude is almost disarmed, and indignation is converted into pity.

Alas! Sinners, *The way of all transgressors is hard*†; but yours is peculiarly so. You, to whom I am now addressing myself, are in the morning of your days, and it is not to be supposed, that the impressions of a good education are yet entirely effaced. What future years may do, I know not; but hitherto, I persuade myself, you have frequently your reflections, and your convictions: Convictions, which have force enough to torment you, though not to reform you: to plant thorns in the paths of sin, though not to reduce you to those of duty. But if you feel nothing of this remorse and anxiety, such a dead calm is then more dreadful than the fiercest storm and tumult of thought: A sad indication, that your course in wickedness has been exceeding swift; indeed so swift, that it is probable it may not be long. Oh that it might immediately be stopped by divine grace, rather than by the vengeance you have so much reason to fear!

At least be engaged to pause in it for a few moments, and let reason and conscience be permitted to speak. How is it that you make yourselves, I will not say entirely, but tolerably easy? Is it by the disbelief of christianity? Do you secretly suspect, that the gospel is but a cunningly devised fable? Yet even that suspicion is not enough. Let me rather ask, "Are you so confident it is so, that you will venture to stake even the life of your souls upon its falsehood!" If you were come to such a confidence, yet it is amazing to me, how, even on the principles of natural religion alone, persons in your circumstances can make themselves easy. Can any of the libertines of the present age, that believe a God, imagine that he is *Altogether such a one as themselves*‡? Can they flatter themselves so far as to hope, that they, in the ways of negligence, profaneness, and debauchery, are like to meet with a more favourable treatment

* Isa. vii. 13. † Prov. xiii. 15. ‡ Psal. l. 21.

from him, than those pious parents whose principles they deride; or that this loose and irregular course will end better, than that life of prayer and self-denial, of faith and love, of spirituality and heavenly-mindedness, which they discerned in them? Few are so abandoned, even of common sense, as to think this?

But these are more distant concerns. I bless God, this kind of infidelity is not in fashion here. You assent to the gospel as true, and therefore must know, that God, who observes and records your conduct now, will bring you into judgment for it another day. And if you go on thus, how will you stand in that judgment? What will you plead? On what will you repose the confidence of your souls, that will not prove a broken reed, which will go up into your hand, and pierce you deep, in proportion to the stress you lay upon it? While you behave like a *generation of vipers, think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our father**. Think not to plead a relation to the religious parents, whose God and whose ways you have forsaken. Think not to plead an early dedication to him in the baptismal covenant, which you have broken, despised, and in fact renounced. Think not to plead that external profession, which you have so shamefully contradicted, and even by wearing it, dishonoured. You will see the weakness of such pleas as these, and will not dare to trifle with that awful tribunal, so far as to mention them there. And when you are yourselves thus silent and confounded, who will appear as an advocate in your favour? Your parents were often presenting their supplications and intercessions for you before the throne of grace, but there will be no room to present them before the throne of justice: Nor will they have any inclination to do it. All the springs of natural fondness will be dried up; they will no longer regard you as their children, when they see you in the accursed number of the enemies of their God.

And when you are thus disowned by your parents, and disowned by God, whither will you cause your shame and your terror to go? You, who have had so many privileges, and so many opportunities, perhaps I may add, so many fond presumptuous hopes too, how will you bear to see multitudes coming from carnal and profane families, to share with your parents in the inheritance of glory, from which you are excluded? You, who were *the children of the kingdom;* whose remorse therefore must be the more cutting; whose condemnation therefore must be the more weighty! Observe in how strong and lively a

* Matt. iii. 7, 9.

view, our Lord has represented this awful thought, in words, which though immediately addressed to the unbelieving Jews, are remarkably applicable to you*: *There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob,* (your pious ancestors,) *in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out: And many shall come from the north, and the south, and the east, and the west, and shall sit down* with them *in the kingdom of God; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into utter darkness*†.

But through the divine forbearance you are not yet shut out. There is still hope even for you, if you will now return to the God of your fathers, from whom, by these aggravated transgressions, you have so deeply revolted. Let me then once more tenderly intreat you, and solemnly charge you, by the consolations of the living, and by the memory of the pious dead, by your present comforts, by your future hopes, by the nearly approaching solemnities of death and judgment, by the mercies of God, and by the blood of a Redeemer, that you consider, *And shew yourselves men*‡; that you set yourselves, as it were, attentively to read over the characters inscribed on your memories and understandings in the course of a religious education; that you hearken to the voice of conscience repeating those admonitions, and to the voice of the blessed God, as speaking in his word to confirm them; and finally, that you apply to him in a most importunate manner, for those victorious influences of his Spirit, which are able to mollify and transform these hearts of stone, and to raise even you, from so low a depth of degeneracy and danger, to the character and happiness of the genuine children of Abraham. *God forbid that I should sin* against your souls, and my own, *in ceasing to pray* that it may be so! And now,

2. I shall conclude all, with an address to those young persons, who have been, through grace, engaged to a becoming improvement of the religious education they have enjoyed.

I have the pleasure of being well assured, that there are many such amongst you: Many who are now the joy of ministers and parents, and the hope of the church for succeeding years. Let me intreat you, my dear brethren and friends, that you daily acknowledge the divine goodness, in favouring you with such advantages; and, what is still more valuable, in giving you a heart to prize and to improve them.

* Luke xiii. 28, 29. †Mat. viii. 11, 12. ‡ Isa. xlvi. 8.

Think how different your circumstances might have been. Providence might have cast your lot in some distant age or country, where the true God had been unknown, where your early steps had been guided to the groves and temples of detestable idols, and you might possibly have been taught to consecrate lust or murder by the name of devotion. Or you might have been educated in popish darkness, where the scriptures would have been to you as a sealed book, and you would have seen christianity polluted with idolatrous rites, on some accounts more inexcusable than those of the heathen, and adulterated with the most absurd and pernicious errors. There the mistaken piety of your parents might have proved a dangerous snare, whilst it had infused a blind, and perhaps a cruel zeal, and a proud furious opposition to all the methods of better information.

Nay, even here, in a protestant country, is it not too evident, there are many families in which had you been born and educated, you had sate as in *darkness and the shadow of death*, though *in the land of light* and *the valley of vision!* Your infant-tongue had been formed to the language of hell, and exercised in curses and oaths, rather than in prayer. You had early been taught to deride every appearance of serious godliness; and all the irregular propensities of nature had been strengthened by examples of wickedness, which might have been sufficient to corrupt innocence itself. When you consider the wide difference between these circumstances and your own, surely whatever your portion of worldly possessions may be, you have reason to lift up your hands to heaven with wonder and gratitude, and to say. *The lines are fallen to us in pleasant places, yea, we have a goodly heritage**.

Nor is this all: There are many around you, who have shared in such advantages as these, and have sinfully abused them, to the dishonour of God, to the grief of their parents, and to their own danger, and perhaps their ruin. And why are not you in that wretched number, or *Who maketh thee to differ from them*†*?* Why are not your hearts barred against the entrance of a Redeemer, but because *The Lord has opened them*‡*?* Why were not all the good instructions which have been given to you, like *seed sown upon a rock;* but because *God gave the increase*§*!* Adore the riches of this distinguishing grace.

And let me earnestly exhort you, that you be careful still farther to improve it. Give me leave to say, that these fair

* Psal. xvi. 6. † 1 Cor. iv. 7. ‡ Acts xvi. 14. § 1 Cor. iii. 7.

openings of early seriousness, do naturally raise a very high expectation of eminent advances in religion. Let it be your humble and diligent care, that these expectations be answered: That *Your goodness* may not be *like the morning cloud, or the early dew, which soon goeth away**; but rather like *The dawning light, which shines brighter and brighter till the perfect day*†.

Whilst providence continues these holy parents, to whom you have been so highly indebted, let it be your constant care, by all the most cheerful returns of duty and gratitude, to express your regards to them, and your sense of so great an obligation. And I will add, let it be your care, to hand down to future ages those important advantages you have received from them.

One *generation passeth away, and another generation cometh*‡. It is highly probable, that in a few years, numbers of you will be conducted into new relations; and we please ourselves with the hope, that you will carry religion and happiness into rising families.

Let not those hopes be disappointed. When God fixes you in houses of your own, let it be your first concern to erect there such domestic altars, as those at which you have worshipped with such holy pleasure, and sensible tokens of divine acceptance. Let the sacred treasure of divine knowledge, which has been deposited with you, be faithfully delivered down to your descendants; that they, in their turn, may arise with the same pious zeal, to transmit it to another generation, that shall be born of them.

And may divine grace, that inexhaustible spring of the most valuable blessings, sweetly flow on to add efficacy to all, that real vital religion, may be the glory and joy of every succeeding age; till this earth (which is but a place of education for the children of God, during their minority,) shall pass away to make room for a far nobler scene and state of existence; where pious parents and their religious offspring shall for ever enjoy the most delightful society, inhabiting the palace of our heavenly Father, and surrounding the throne of our glorified Redeemer! Amen.

* Hos. vi. 4. † Prov. iv. 18. ‡ Eccl. i. 4.

SERMONS

TO

YOUNG PERSONS,

ON THE

FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:

VIZ.

I. The importance of the rising generation.
II. Christ formed in the soul, the foundation of hope.
III. A dissuasive from keeping wicked company.
IV. The young christian invited to an early attendance on the lord's table.
V. The orphan's hope.
VI. The reflections of a pious parent on the death of a wicked child.
VII. Youth reminded of approaching judgment.

DEDICATION.

To the young Persons belonging to the Dissenting Congregations at Hinckley, Harborough, *and* Kibworth *in* Leicestershire, *and at* Ashley, *and* Northampton.

MY DEAR BRETHREN AND FRIENDS,

At length, after a long and unexpected delay, I offer to your perusal a few sermons which I promised the public some years ago; all which some or other of you heard, and in which you are all concerned.

It is not material to tell you, on what account I have laid by some, which I had transcribed for your service, and which you probably expected to have seen with these. I have substituted in their room such, as I thought might, by the divine blessing, be most useful to you.

I hope you will peruse them with candor; and the rather, considering they were prepared for the press chiefly in some broken moments, while I was on journies, or in some fragments of time at home, often taken from my sleep; as the stated duties of my calling require an attendance, which will not allow of any long interruption. You would readily excuse what defects you may discover in them, if you knew that tender concern for your present and future happiness, by which every sermon, and every page has been dictated. They have often been mingled with prayers and with tears; and my heart is so full of affection to you, that it is with great difficulty that I forbear enlarging, more than the proper limits of such an address will admit.

As for you, my Leicestershire friends, amongst whom my ministry was opened, and the first years of it were delightfully spent, I cannot forget, and I hope you have not forgotten, that intimate and pleasing friendship, with which we were once almost daily conversing; the sweet counsel we have often taken together in private, as well as the pleasure with which we *have gone to the house of God in company.* All these sermons, but the second and fifth of them, were first drawn up for your service, and preached to you; and much of that tenderness for you, which gave birth to them, has been rising afresh in my mind, while I have been taking this review of them. *I hope they were* not then *like water* unprofitably *spilt on the ground*, and that the perusal of them may revive impressions made by the first hearing. Intermediate years have introduced new scenes; and some of us, who were then in the morning of life, are now risen up to the meridian of it. Providence has conducted many of you into new relations; and it is my pleasure to observe, in how honourable and how useful a manner several of you are filling them up with their proper duties.

While you are yourselves instances of the happy consequences which attend a religious education, I hope you will be singularly careful, that your descendants may share in the like advantages; and I shall heartily rejoice, if these sermons, or those I have formerly published, may be of any assistance to you in those pious cares. God has put an early period to the lives of some, who, when I was amongst you, were the growing hopes of the respective congregations to which they belonged. Several of them have died while these sermons were transcribing. May the thought quicken you in the improvement of so uncertain a life; and may divine grace render some things, peculiarly intended for the use of those who are now beyond the reach of such an address, serviceable to others, into whose hands they may fall!

I greatly rejoice in the goodness of God to you, in setting over you such able and faithful shepherds, as those worthy ministers of Christ, under whose care you now are; and I heartily pray, that you and they may long be spared, as comforts to

each other, and as blessings to the church. Though I am providentially separated from you, may I still hear that you *walk worthy of the Lord;* and may every advancing year, and revolving day of life, ripen us more for that happiness, which we hope ere long to share with each other, in the house of our heavenly Father!

If any of you, who were once my care and my hope, have now forsaken the ways and the God of your fathers, and turned aside to the paths of licentiousness and folly, I now repeat the admonitions which I have formerly given you, that *these things will*, to you above all others, *be bitterness in the end.* And I intreat you, that if you have any little regard still remaining, for one, to whom some of you have professed not a little, you would at least attentively peruse the sixth of these discourses, as containing reflections, which must, sooner or later, pierce your hearts, with penitential remorse, or everlasting despair. Oh, that divine grace might concur with it to prevent your ruin, and might give me to see you as wise, as religious, and as happy, as those excellent parents once wished you, whose eyes are now closed in the dust; whose precepts and examples, charges and tears, you seem long since to have forgot!

As for you, my dear friends here at home, I have the pleasure of conversing so often with you, that it is the less necessary now to address you at large. Yet it is but justice to you thus publicly to declare, that, amidst all that *goodness and mercy*, which has *followed me all my days*, there is no providence, which I more gratefully own, than that which brought me hither; nor does any thing contribute more to make my ministry here comfortable, than the spirit of seriousness which discovers itself in many young persons amongst us. Oh, that it were as universal as in some it is amiable and exemplary! Permit me to remind you, that, as your remarkable importunity was the consideration, which turned the scales for my coming hither, after they had long hovered in uncertainty, so you are under some peculiar obligations to study the ease and comfort of my life, which you can never so effectually secure, as by the holy regularity of your own. Our aged friends are dropping away apace; nay, the graves have swallowed up many, very many of your own age, who, but a few months ago, promised long and extensive usefulness here. It is you that are to comfort me under these sorrows. I can solemnly say, that I had much rather be numbered amongst them, than live to see the glory of practical religion lost in this society, while it is under my care. Remember, that, under God, you are its support; and remember, that the high hopes you have given me, would make a disappointment sit so much the heavier upon my heart.

But I will not conclude with any thing so uncomfortable, as the mention of a disappointment from you; but rather with recommending you, and those to whom I have formerly stood in the like relation, to the care of Christ, *the great Shepherd of the sheep*, and to the influence of that gracious Spirit, who can cause you to grow in knowledge and piety *like the grass, and like willows by the water-courses.* A generous friend* is intending some of you a present of that course of sermons, which I am now preaching on the Power and Grace of Christ, and the evidences of his *glorious gospel;* and it much sweetens the labour of preparing them for the press, to reflect, that they are in part intended for your service. I hope you will not forget to pray for all that appear concerned for your spiritual edification and eternal happiness, and more especially for

Your most affectionate

and faithful friend and servant,

P. DODDRIDGE.

Northampton, Dec. 30, 1734.

* William Coward, Esq:

SERMONS

TO YOUNG PERSONS.

SERMON I.

The Importance of the rising Generation.

Psalm xxii. 30, 31.—*A Seed shall serve him, it shall be accounted to the Lord for a Generation: They shall come, and shall declare his Righteousness unto a People that shall be born, that he hath done this.*

IT is a very beautiful saying of an ancient jewish writer*, which has its parallel amongst some of the finest of the heathen poets†, that "as of the green leaves on a thick tree, some fall, and others grow; so of the generations of flesh and blood, one cometh to an end, and another is born." In this respect the resemblance is obvious; but there is another, in which it will not always so evidently hold. We perceive not any remarkable difference between the leaves of one year, and of another: They which open at the return of the spring, are commonly as large and fair, as those which the preceding winter had destroyed. But it has been matter of long lamentation, that the children of men are continually sinking into deeper and deeper degeneracy. Solomon‡ denies not *that the former days were better* than the present, when he cautions against too curious an enquiry into the reasons why such an alteration was permitted: And those who know little else of the most celebrated writers of antiquity, can quote their complaints on this melancholy occasion. They can tell you, that Homer§ observes, "that children are seldom better, but frequently worse, than their parents;" and they often repeat that

* Eccles. xiv. 18.

† Homer. Iliad. ζ ver. 146—149. Φ ver. 463—467.—Mus. apud Clem. Alex. Strom. Lib. VI.

‡ Eccles. vii. 10.

§ Παυροι γαρ τοι παιδες ομοιοι πατρι πελονται,
Οι πλεονες κακιους, παυροι δε τε πατρος αρειους.
Homer. Odys. B. 276, 277.

lively and comprehensive acknowledgment of Horace*: "Our fathers who fell short of the virtues of their ancestors, have produced us a generation worse than themselves; and our children will be yet more degenerate than we."

These complaints and forebodings have been borrowed by every age since they were published, and are to this day borrowed by us, as what we imagine more applicable to ourselves, than to those who wrote them, or to any who have already cited them. I will not say, there is universal cause for such an application; but I am sure, the face of affairs in many families, and may I not add, in many churches too, is abundantly sufficient not only to excuse, but to vindicate it.

In the midst of this mournful survey, the heart of every pious Israelite will tremble for the ark of the Lord, and he will be ready to say, perhaps with an excess of solicitude and of anguish, *What will be the end of these things*†? Surely God will utterly abandon those who so basely desert him, in contempt of the clearest revelation of his gospel, and the most engaging or awakening calls of his providence. The very memory of religion will at length be lost; and *When the Son of man cometh, he will not find faith on the earth*‡."

Now there seems to be something in the very sound of the text, which may relieve our minds under these gloomy apprehensions. *A seed shall serve him, it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation: They shall come, and declare his name to* a third succession; *a people who shall be born* of them. Here is an evident promise or prediction, that the knowledge and the fear of God should be propagated from one age and generation to another: And this must be an agreeable assurance, whatever the particular occasion were on which it was introduced. Were this psalm to be considered only as relating to the calamities of David, and the wonderful deliverance which God wrought out for him, the words before us might be improved for our own consolation on the justest principles of analogy; for if a temporal salvation granted to him were to make so deep and so lasting an impression on distant nations and on future ages, how reasonably might the like effects be expected from that infinitely more important and extensive salvation, which is exhibited to us in the everlasting gospel?

* Ætas Parentum pejor Avis tulit
Nos nequiores, mox daturos
Progeniem vitiosiorem.
Horat. Lib. III. Od. VI. v. 46, &c.

† Dan. xii. 8. ‡ Luke xviii. 8.

But after all, the application of this passage of scripture, to the purposes for which I have alledged it, does not depend on so long a train of consequences; for if we attentively peruse this psalm, and diligently survey the distress and the glory which are described in the several parts of it, we must be obliged to confess, that a greater than David is here. It contains a most lively and sublime prophecy of the sufferings of the Messiah, and the exaltation with which they were to be rewarded*; and particularly mentions the calling of the gentiles into his church, and the propagation of his religion to future ages†. *All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee: All they who are fat upon the earth*, i. e. by an usual Hebraism, Persons of eminent rank and in plentiful circumstances‡, *shall eat and worship*, i. e. they shall pay their public homage to him, and enter themselves solemnly into his covenant, as the jewish votaries did by eating of the sacrifices which were offered to him: And, on the other hand, *those that go down to the dust*, i. e. who are in the most indigent circumstances, *shall bow before them*§, even *he that cannot keep alive his own soul*‖, who is so poor that he wants the necessaries of life: As if it had been said, there shall be an universal submission to him, in which the greatest and meanest shall concur. And the text assures us, that his triumphs shall be as lasting, as extensive: *A* future *seed shall serve him*; they *shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation*; i. e. being brought to the knowledge and the profession of the true religion, they shall be owned by God as his people: And it shall be their pious care, to *declare* this glorious display of *his*

* See particularly, ver. 7, 14, 16, 18, 27, & seq. † Ver. 27—31.

‡ See Psal. lxxviii. 31. Isa. x. 16. Psal. xvii. 10. and compare Psal. xlv. 12. lxxii. 10, 11. Isa lx. 3, 5, 10, 13. Rev. xxi. 24. All which texts speak of the submission of princes and great men to Christ.

§ Compare Isa. xxvi. 19. Neh. iii. 18. 1 Sam. ii. 8.

‖ So the French translate this clause, "Mêmes celui qui ne peut garentir sa vie:" And so several famous commentators explain it, particularly Rivetus; "Famelici, qui non habent quo vitam sustineant." Thus also Buchanan paraphrases on the words,

> Fleetet illi poplitem
> Pauper sepulchri in limine,
> Qui membra fessis artubus languentia
> Fugiente vitâ vix trahit.

It is certain the phrase here translated, "keep alive the soul," is often used for preservation of the animal life; Gen. xix. 19. 1 Kings xx. 31. Ezek. xiii. 19. And the meat, which was purchased at so expensive a rate at the siege of Jerusalem, is said to relieve or restore the soul, Lam. i. 11.

righteousness to a people who shall be born* of them, *that he has done this;* that it is the hand of God which has wrought out this great salvation. And though there are not many generations mentioned here, yet other scriptures assure us, that the kingdom of the Messiah is to be of perpetual duration, and consequently that such promises as these are to be taken in their utmost extent. *In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth. His name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him*†.

Upon the whole then, it appears, that the words of the text are a prophecy, that the kingdom of Christ shall be perpetual, and extend itself to the latest generations, as well as the remotest climates: And, through the divine goodness, we must acknowledge, that this day is this scripture in part fulfilled among us. We dwell in a country, which, with regard to Judea, lay at the *ends of the earth*, and which was long over-run with barbarity and idolatry: Yet we are now instructed in the knowledge of the God of Israel, and are this day assembled for his worship; so that at the distance of more than two thousand years from the publication of this prediction, we are the living witnesses of its truth; being ourselves *A seed* who profess *to serve the Lord, and accounted to him for a generation.*

I hope it is the concern of many of us, that the concluding words may be fulfilled in those who come after us; that his gospel righteousness may so be declared to them, that they likewise might be engaged to serve the Lord, not only in the external forms of the true religion, but with the affections of the heart, and the obedience of the life.

That this concern may be more deep, more active, and more universal, it will be the business of my present discourse, to represent to you at large the importance of the rising generation. And here I would aim, not merely at the demonstration of a speculative truth, which may leave your minds as cold and as irregular as it found them; but I would labour, by the divine assistance, to possess you with such a sense of the case, as may have a powerful influence on your temper and behaviour; that so your meditations on this excellent promise may, through the concurrence of God, be the means of its more complete accomplishment.

I am now particularly concerned, that you my younger

* Compare Rom. iii. 25, 26. † Psal. lxxii. 7, 17.

brethren may be impressed with what I say: I shall therefore address myself directly to you, and endeavour to shew how important and desirable it is, that you be early tinctured with a sense of religion, and heartily engaged in the service of God.

May the spirit of God, in the mean time, so speak to your hearts, as that life and energy might be added to those convictions, which I am confident your reason will not be able to oppose!

Now I would intreat you, on this occasion, seriously to consider the importance of your character and behaviour, with regard both to yourselves, and others.

I. Nothing can be of greater importance, with regard to yourselves, than your being early engaged in the service of God.

It is a consideration which equally concerns you, and others of a more advanced age, that religion is, generally speaking, the surest way we can take to be happy in this world, and through the merits and righteousness of a Redeemer, the only way to glory in another: So that, as the apostle expresses it, *godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come**.

Its tendency to promote our present comfort and happiness, will abundantly appear from the influence which it has on our external circumstances, and on the temper of our minds. As to the former of these, I might enlarge on its beneficial effects, with regard to health and reputation, estate and friendship: And as to the latter, nothing is more obvious than that it tends to secure the tranquillity, and the pleasure of the soul, as it either suppresses, or moderates, those turbulent passions which throw it into anguish and confusion, while it gives abundant exercise to those which are most sweet and delightful. Such is the immediate *blessedness of the man who feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his commandments*†. And whosoever reflects on the evidence with which each of these particulars is attended, must acknowledge, that *The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*‡.

To complete the argument, it is to be considered, that these pleasant and peaceful paths lead up to the paradise of God: For invariable truth and goodness has engaged, that *To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality*, he will render *eternal life*§.

* 1 Tim. iv. 8. † Psal. cxii. 1. ‡ Prov. iii. 17. § Rom. ii. 7.

On the other hand, if you go on in the neglect of God and religion, it is very possible you may be undone for this world, as thousands have been, by debauchery and folly: Or, under some restraints of common prudence, which may secure you from that, if you do not violently over-bear the voice of conscience, it will often disquiet and torment you by its remonstrances and expostulations; till in a little time death will remove you to the seats of horror, where *The worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched**. For God has solemnly declared, that he will render *Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, to every soul of man that doeth evil*† *; when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God, and obey not the gospel*‡.

Are not the youngest of you concerned in such declarations as these? And if you are, let conscience say, whether they are to be despised. It evidently appears, the question is this: Shall you spend your days upon earth like rational creatures, in the noblest enjoyment of God and of yourselves, till you rise to the glories and pleasures of the heavenly world? Or shall you live like idiots and like brutes, in the amusements of a vain imagination, and the indulgence of the meanest appetites, till you sink for ever under all the shame and remorse of a polluted guilty mind, and the almighty vengeance of an incensed God? And can you be so stupid as to imagine this question will bear a debate, or that any of the little interests of time and sense are to be regarded, while these things are forgotten? Surely I may say, with the utmost propriety, as Moses to the children of Israel§, *I have this day been setting before you life and death, a blessing and a curse;* chuse which shall be your portion; but make the choice as those that remember, *It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life*‖.

"It is true," may you perhaps reply in your own minds, "these are solid arguments to prove, that religion is to be attended to, sooner or later; but it will not appear from them, that it is peculiarly the concern of the rising generation." I answer in one word, as you have often heard more at large, If it is to be regarded at all, it should be regarded immediately; because all the futurity you presume upon is utterly precarious. The uncertainty of human life, and our entire dependence on that sacred Spirit, who is perfectly free in all his operations, concur to demonstrate, beyond all possibility of contradiction,

* Mark ix. 44. † Rom. ii. 8, 9. ‡ 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.
§ Deut. xxx. 19. ‖ Deut. xxxii. 47.

the madness of delay; and the ruin of thousands bears testimony to it. I might add, that there are many peculiar advantages of early piety, which render it vastly preferable to a late repentance, even supposing it were as certain, as it is dubious: But I shall not enter into the enumeration of them now, since I intend them for the subject of a distinct discourse*. What I have already said may be sufficient to convince you, if you allow yourselves to reflect, that your own present and future happiness is apparently concerned in the case before us. I add,

II. That it is of great importance to the happiness of others, that you of the rising generation be early tinctured with a sense of religion, or, in the language of the text, be *a seed who shall serve the Lord.*

And here I would shew at large,—that the happiness of all who converse with you may be considerably influenced by your character and behaviour;—that the comfort of your pious parents and ministers is peculiarly concerned in it;—and that the propagation of religion to them who are yet unborn sons, under God, must evidently depend upon you.

1. The happiness of all who converse with you will be considerably influenced by your character and behaviour.

They who have any sense of religion themselves will be tenderly concerned for your happiness. They will rejoice to see you go on in those ways which must surely lead to it; and they will be heartily grieved to see you chusing your own misery, and *Rejecting the counsel of God against yourselves*†. And others of a humane and generous temper, though destitute of the principles of true piety, will be solicitous for the honour, the comfort, and the usefulness of your lives.

But besides this pleasure or uneasiness, which will redound to such persons, in consequence of these friendly and benevolent sentiments, you ought to consider, that all who converse with you may find their happiness increased or diminished, by your regard to religion, or your neglect of it, as your behaviour to them will be influenced by it.

If you be early delivered into the mould of the gospel, you

* Mr. Jennings's excellent sermon on this subject, amongst his other Discourses to young People, has prevented the publication of the sermon here referred to. I hope my young friends will furnish themselves with those condescending and useful pieces, if there be any of them that have not yet done it.

† Luke vii. 30.

will quickly learn you were not born for yourselves. The mercies of God, and the example of a Redeemer, will teach you to exert yourselves to the utmost for the service of mankind, and *To do good to all as you have opportunity**. And in how many instances may your pious and charitable cares be effectual for the benefit of your fellow-creatures! In the series of life, how many in the depths of poverty may be relieved by your liberality! How many in perplexed and intricate circumstances may be guided aright by your prudent counsel! How many weeping eyes may be dried, and how many mourning hearts revived, by your tender sympathy and friendly condolence! And if there be already in your natural temper a tendency towards such expressions of humanity, how happily may it be directed and enlivened, when divine and evangelical motives are brought in to its assistance!

But farther, your christian charity will teach you to be above all things solicitous for the spiritual and eternal happiness of those about you. And who can say, how much you may promote it! How many more aged christians may be excited to shake off their indolence, and quicken their pace when they observe your ardency and zeal; and how happily might your piety tend to awaken and reclaim those, who are going on in *the paths of the destroyer:* How amiable would the graces of christianity appear, as exemplified in you, amidst all the insnaring allurements of childhood and youth! and how affecting might it be to other young people, to hear religion recommended to them, not only by their parents and ministers, but by their brethren and companions!

Thus useful might you be in your earliest years; and as you were advancing in age and experience, your usefulness might be daily increasing; and if God should spare you to the decline of life, you might bring forth much nobler *fruits in old age*, than you could have done, if your entrance on a religious life had been deferred to that unseasonable time.

Thus may the whole period of your life be filled with eminent service: And I will add, that your beneficial influence may extend far beyond the circle of your personal converse. You may be blessings to your country, indeed to the whole world, by drawing down the favour of God upon it, in part as a crown of your piety, and an answer to your prayers. But,

On the contrary, if you neglect religion, you will deprive the world of all those benefits, which it may otherwise expect

* Gal. vi. 10.

from you. If you are naturally covetous, you will probably indulge that unworthy temper, so as to withhold relief from those to whom it is most justly due: Or if you be of a liberal disposition, your generosity will degenerate into prodigality; or perhaps you will squander away so much of your estates in vanity and debauchery, as to throw yourselves out of a capacity of assisting those, whom you most sincerely pity, and would gladly relieve: And as to the eternal happiness of others, it is not to be imagined that you will have any regard to it while you are negligent of your own.

Nor is this the worst; for, as hardly any are mere cyphers in life, it is much to be feared, that instead of blessings, you may prove mischiefs to the world. The licentiousness, to which corrupt nature will prompt you, may lead you by unthought-of consequences, to injure and defraud, as well as to grieve and torment others. And where your behaviour is most friendly, it may be most pernicious. Instead of restoring and reclaiming the souls of your companions, you may pervert and destroy them by sinful discourses and impious examples. Thus you may draw down the vengeance of God on the places where you live, and provoke him to send some public calamity, as a punishment for that universal degeneracy which you have abetted. So that, to close the melancholy scene, at the bar of God, and in the seats of torment, you may meet with multitudes of unhappy creatures, who will cry out on you, as the fatal cause of their ruin in this world, and their condemnation in that.

By such a variety of arguments does it appear, that the happiness of those you converse with will be considerably influenced by your temper and conduct. And are you so utterly lost to all sentiments of honour and goodness, as to be unconcerned at such a consideration as this? Again,

2. The comfort and happiness of your religious parents, in a great measure, depend on your seriousness and piety.

What I have just been saying on the former heads, will evidently prove the truth of this observation. Your pious parents have a generous concern for the happiness of others, and this will engage them earnestly to wish, that you may be blessings, and not curses, to the world about you: And their peculiar affection for you must tenderly interest them in a case, on which your happiness, both in time and eternity, depends.

If they see you under the influences of early piety, unknown pleasure will arise in their minds: They will rejoice in it, not merely as it will be a security to them of a respectful and

grateful treatment from you ; but as it will, through grace, secure to you, their dear offspring, the entertainments of a religious life, and the prospects of a glorious immortality.

These reflections will give them inexpressible pleasure in a variety of circumstances. Their daily converse with you will be more agreeable to them, than it could otherwise be, when they discern the lively impressions of religion upon your spirits, and perceive that you have a relish for those truths and promises of the gospel, which are their joy and *Song in the house of their pilgrimage**. It will sometimes add a sweetness to the social exercises of devotion, to think that your souls are engaged with theirs, and regaled with the same sublime and transporting entertainments. And when they have reason to apprehend that you are retired for the duties of the closet, it will cheer their hearts to think, " Now is my child with his heavenly Father. Now has he separated himself from those vain amusements, which most of the same age pursue, that he may converse with God and his own soul, and be prepared for the business and the pleasures of heaven. And I hope, God is smiling upon him, and teaching him, by happy experience, that those pious labours are not in vain."

With such consolations will their hearts be supported in all the occurrences, which providence may allot, either to you, or them. If they meet with prosperity in their worldly affairs, and have a prospect of leaving you in plentiful circumstances, it will be a satisfaction to them to think, that they shall not consign their estates to those, who will meanly hoard up the income of them, or throw it away in foolish and hurtful lusts; but to persons who will consider themselves as the stewards of God, and will endeavour to use what he has given to them for the honour of their Lord, and the good of mankind. Or if they can give you but little, this thought will relieve them, that they commend you to the care of a guardian and a father, who is able abundantly to supply your necessities, and who has engaged, by the promises of his covenant, that *Those who fear him shall want no good thing*†. They will have the pleasure to think, that, how low soever your outward condition may be, you will be rich in grace, and in the entertainments of religion now, and in the glories of the heavenly inheritance at last. When they are themselves sinking under the decays of nature, their vigour and cheerfulness will be renewed in yours: Or should yours be impaired by an afflictive providence, they will

* Psal. cxix. 54. † Psal. xxxiv. 9. lxxxiv. 11.

have the satisfaction of believing, that those afflictions proceed from a divine love, and shall at length turn to your advantage. It will revive their hearts in their dying moments to think, that when they are sleeping in the dust, you will stand up in their places, and support the interest of God in the world, with a fidelity and zeal perhaps superior to theirs. Or if an afflictive stroke should take you away before them, they will not mourn over your graves, *As those that have no hope**. Faith will teach them to mingle praises with their tears, while it assures them, that though dead to them, you are living with God in glory; that you are preferred to an attendance on his throne above, where they may hope shortly to meet you on the most advantageous terms.

This is but a faint and imperfect description of the satisfaction, which your parents would find in your early piety. And it follows from hence, as a necessary consequence, that if they see you grow up in the neglect of religion, it will pierce their hearts with proportionable sorrow.

It is possible, that you may arrive at such a daring degree of wickedness, as to treat them with negligence and contempt, or perhaps to answer all their melting expostulations with insults and rage. Such ungrateful and rebellious monsters we have heard of; and would to God, that every parent in this assembly could say, that he had only heard of them! But should you preserve some sense of humanity and decency; nay, should you behave towards them in the most dutiful and obliging manner, yet they must still mourn over you; and even your tenderness and complaisance to them would sometimes come in to add a more sensible anguish to their affliction. It would cut them to the heart to think, that such dear, and, in other respects, amiable children, were still the enemies of God, and the heirs of destruction. When they heard the vengeance of God denounced against sinners, and read the awful threatnings of his word, they would tremble to think, that those terrible thunders were levelled against you. How little could they rejoice in that health, or plenty, which they saw you were abusing to your aggravated ruin! And how would they be terrified when any distemper seized you, lest it should be the messenger to bear you away to eternal misery! If they were themselves dying, how mournfully must they take their leave of you, in the apprehension of seeing you no more till the day of accounts, and seeing you then in ignominy and horror at the left hand of the judge! Or if they

* 1 Thess. iv. 13.

saw you removed by an early death, to what hopeless sorrows would they be abandoned! With what unknown agonies would they adopt that pathetic lamentation of David, *Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would to God I had died for thee! Oh Absalom, my son, my son*!*

By such a variety of considerations does it appear, that the comfort and happiness of your pious parents does very much depend upon your temper and behaviour. And the argument is confirmed by the repeated testimony of the wisest of men, under the influence of the divine spirit. He tells us again and again, that *A wise son maketh a glad father*†; that *Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father*‡; and that *The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice; and he that begetteth a wise child, shall have joy of him*§. On the other hand, he tells us, that *A foolish son is the heaviness of his mother*‖: And though the tenderness of her sex may make the mother peculiarly sensible of the affliction, yet it is not confined to her; for he tells us elsewhere, that *A foolish son is a grief to his father*, as well as *bitterness to her that bare him***; yea, *A foolish son is the calamity of his father*††: And once more, *He that begetteth a fool, doth it to his sorrow; and the father of a fool has no joy*‡‡; for the wickedness of his son impairs his relish for the other enjoyments of life.

Such a multitude of passages to the same purpose seem intended to teach us the importance, as well as the certainty of the argument. And it is more than hinted at in those remarkable words, *My son, if thy heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine*§§: As if he had said, Make a serious pause, and diligently weigh the importance of that thought, that thy piety will be an inexpressible joy to me, to thy father. And then, as if that were not enough, it is immediately added, *Yea, my reins also shall rejoice*, shall feel unutterable pleasure diffusing itself through all the secret recesses of my soul, *when thy lips speak right things*‖‖, which may manifest an heart under the influence of prudence, and of religion.

And let me intreat you, my friends, to reflect for a few moments on the weight of the argument, that you may judge whether it will not bear all the stress which Solomon lays upon it. The happiness of your parents is in question; and can you

* 2 Sam. xviii. 33. † Prov. x. 1. xv. 20. ‡ Prov. xxix. 3. § Prov. xxiii. 24.
‖ Prov. x. 1. ** Prov. xvii. 25. †† Prov. xix. 13. ‡‡ Prov. xvii. 21.
§§ Prov. xxiii. 15. See the like emphatical form of speaking, ver. 24, 25.
‖‖ Prov xxiii. 16.

slight that? Consider how much you owe to your parents, as they were the instruments of your being, and have been under God, the principal support of it. Think of the tenderness with which they watched around your cradles, and of the many kind offices which they performed for you in your helpless infancy; which parental tenderness, made delightful to them, when hardly any thing else could have made them tolerable. Think how liberally they have long contributed towards the supply of your wants; and in how many instances they have denied themselves, that they might gratify you. Think how they have rejoiced with you in your joys, and mourned with you in your sorrows; how they have been terrified at your real dangers; and perhaps often disquieted with those timorous apprehensions, which fondness, rather than reason, has suggested to them. And under the impression of these reflections, say, whether it may not reasonably be expected, that you should have a most affectionate regard to their repose and comfort, and think with horror of becoming their grief and their torment.

I may add, that as the parents of some amongst you are declining under the infirmities of age, and on that account the objects of a respectful compassion to all, they should be so especially to you who are their children; for it may be, these infirmities have been hastened upon them by an excess of tenderness and concern for you. And will you *Add afflictions to the afflicted, and bring down with sorrow to the grave** those venerable hoary heads, which you have perhaps made grey before their time? Surely you must abhor the thought, or God and man must abhor you.

But I would not entertain so harsh a suspicion; I charitably hope, that you are not only impressed with this consideration, but will likewise be somewhat concerned, when you hear:

3. That the comfort and happiness of faithful ministers will be greatly affected by the character of the rising generation.

St. John assures *The elect lady*, that he *rejoiced greatly, when he found her children walking in the truth*†; and a variety of arguments concur to prove, that no pious minister can be indifferent in the case before us.

If we have any thing of humanity and generosity in our tempers, we must be concerned for your seriousness, on account

* Gen. xlii. 38. † 2 John ver. 4.

of that influence which it has on the happiness of all about you, and particularly on that of your christian parents. Many of them are the ornaments and glory of our assemblies, and the most dear and intimate of our friends; we are obliged therefore to take part with them in their sorrows and their joys, with relation to you their children. It must sensibly afflict us to see, that while their wisdom and their piety might command the reverence and the love of all that know them, enemies should arise against them out of their own houses, and that even the children of their bowels should prove their tormentors: Those dear children, from whom they fondly promised themselves the delight and support of their declining years. And, when they come and tell us the tender story, when they freely open to us their sorrows and their fears on your account, and earnestly beg our prayers for you, that whatever they suffer, you may not be for ever undone, we are hardly able to stand it; but nature, as well as religion, teaches us to echo back their sighs, and to return their tears.

Thus we are concerned for the rising generation, as we sympathize with those whose happiness is apparently affected by it: But besides this, you may easily apprehend, that much of the comfort of our lives does immediately depend upon it. And this will be peculiarly obvious with regard to those of us, who are in our younger years, and are entering on the work of God amongst you*.

Should God spare us to future years, we must expect to survive many of our aged friends; and when your parents are gone, whither must we look for the comfort of our remaining days, but to you their children? And must it not wound us to the heart, to see a *Generation of vipers* rising up, instead of those pious friends, with whom *We have taken sweet counsel together, and gone to the house of God in company*†? Can we easily bear to see the temples and altars of God forsaken, or to see them attended only by wretched hypocrites, who wear the *Form of godliness*, while they are strangers and enemies to the *Power of it*‡? Must we lose the pleasure of addressing you in public, as true christians, on the most comfortable and joyful subjects of discourse; and be obliged continually to speak to you in thunders, as those who have no right to the consola-

* N. B. This was the case of the author when this sermon was preached at Kibworth, May 18, 1724.

† Psal. lv. 14. ‡ 2 Tim. iii. 5.

tions of the gospel? Or must we never have the satisfaction of conversing with you in private, as our brethren in the Lord, and our companions in the way to heaven?

Well might it grieve us to be thus left alone in the midst of a degenerate world; especially when we reflected, that the cause of God was sinking in the time of our administrations, and serious religion was lost amongst us, whilst the cultivation of it was committed to our care. Shall we not be suspected of unfaithfulness to God, and to you, if it die in our hands? That were dreadful indeed. May the divine grace preserve us from that guilt! And I trust, my brethren, that it will preserve us; and, in dependence upon that, I plainly tell you, that while God continues us in a capacity of doing it, we will honestly warn you, we will seriously expostulate with you, we will earnestly pray for you; and if it be all in vain, we will appeal to an omniscient God, that your destruction is not chargeable upon us, but upon yourselves.

But in the mean time, it would be dreadful to reflect, that while we are thus endeavouring to deliver our own souls, we are in effect heaping aggravated damnation on yours; while every attempt is resisted by you, and so brings you under a greater load of guilt. You may indeed be insensible of the load now, but we foresee the day when you will sink under it. And here is the accent of our sorrow; in such views as these we fear, that when the ministers of former generations shall appear before their judge with a train of happy souls, which have been conducted to heaven by their means, it must be our melancholy part to stand out as witnesses against our hearers, that we *Have stretched out* our *hands all the day long to a disobedient and a gainsaying people**. Oh, how shall we be able to advance this dreadful testimony against the children of our dearest friends, against those whom we tenderly loved, and whose salvation we would have purchased with any thing, but our own! Yet this is our prospect with regard to you; and we may leave it to you to judge, whether it must not sadden our souls.

Now pardon me, my friends, if I tell you, that we may reasonably expect, that an argument of this nature should not be despised. I hope it is no breach of modesty to say, that we have not deserved so ill at your hands, as that our joy, or our distress, should be indifferent to you. In all the common

* Rom. x. 21.

affairs of life we would cheerfully serve you to the utmost of our power, and therefore at least reasonably expect to stand on a level with the rest of your friends in like circumstances. And our character as ministers, if we be careful to answer it, gives us some peculiar claim to your regard. For you we give up many more splendid prospects in life, which, in other employments, we might possibly have secured; for you we lay out our time and our strength, in study, in prayer, and in preaching. We bear you upon our hearts in our public ministrations, and our private retirements: (And God is witness with what sincerity.) Nor would we refuse those laborious services, which, in human probability, might hasten upon us the infirmities of age, and the approach of death, if they might be the happy means of your conversion and salvation. And is this the reward of all our friendly care? to weaken our hands, to grieve our souls, and to behave in such a manner, that the more tenderly we love you, the more deeply we must be afflicted by you?

Many of you treat us with a great deal of humanity and decency; with the appearances of affection and esteem. You are ready to serve us in the common offices of friendship, and would express your resentment if you saw us injured, in actions, or in words. We thankfully acknowledge your goodness in such instances as these; but permit us to ask you, why you will not be so kind and so grateful to us, as to take care of your own souls, when nothing could oblige us more than such a care, and nothing can afflict us more than the neglect of them? Let me conclude this head with those pathetic words of the apostle, *If there be any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye our joy**. And let me intreat you to consider, once more,

4. That the propagation of religion to future generations does, under God, chiefly depend upon you.

For this reason the pious Israelites are represented, as resolving to declare the wonderful works of God unto their children, *That the generation to come might know them, even the children that should be born;* that *they might arise, and,* in their turn, *declare them unto their children*†, and so the intail might be carried on to the remotest ages.

Now, my brethren, it is evident, that the propagation of religion to succeeding generations does, humanly speaking, depend on you, and others, who with you are entering upon life. If you are under the influences of serious godliness, you will

* Phil. ii. 1, 2. † Psal. lxxviii.

carry them along with you to the end of your days; and when God calls you into families of your own, it will be your desire that *You and your houses may serve him**. Family prayer, and family-instruction will be maintained: You will be teaching your children to know the Lord, and exhorting them to serve him, and praying for a blessing on those endeavours: And who knows what a remarkable blessing might attend them? Your children, under the impressions of such an education may be eminent for religion, as you have been. They may be equally diligent in the care of their posterity, and God may favour them with equal success; and so there may be thousands of your remote descendents, who never saw you, nor perhaps heard of your name, who yet, under God, may owe their religion and their happiness to you. The prospect of it may now afford you a sensible pleasure; and it is highly probable, that when they meet you in the regions of the invisible world, such an important obligation may engage them to treat you with peculiar respect and affection: As surely all other obligations will appear trifling, when compared with this.

On the other hand, if you neglect religion yourselves, it cannot be thought you will be much concerned to transmit it to others. You would hardly be at the pains to give them good instructions; supposing you much more capable of doing it than you can expect to be: Or if you do attempt it, those instructions will be like to have little effect, when they are contradicted by the daily language of your example. Nay, it is possible you may arrive at such a height of wickedness, as directly to oppose practical godliness, and breed up your children in the contempt of it; which is often to be seen, even in this christian country. And what do you think will become of such children as these? If you have been so wicked, notwithstanding all the restraints of a serious education, what will they be, who miss of the advantages you enjoyed, and must be exposed to numberless temptations from which you were free? Shall these be *a seed to serve the Lord?* Shall these be *accounted to him for a generation?* It might almost as well be expected, that a race of men should spring up in a desart, where no human creature ever appeared before them, as that true christianity should be propagated in the world by the children of such an education.

And have you, after all, so utter an indifference to the honour of that Redeemer, into whose religion you were baptized, and whose name you bear, as that you could be contented it

* Josh. xxiv. 15.

should be lost in the world? Was it for this, that the Son of God descended from heaven that he might publish the gospel covenant, and expired on the cross that he might establish it? Was it for this, that the pious labours of our ancestors have transmitted this religion to us through so many succeeding ages; and that so many martyrs have sealed it by their sufferings and their blood? Was it for this, that our sacred liberties have been so courageously asserted by the best of men, and almost miraculously defended by the hand of God? For this, That the precious intail should be cut off by us, and this invaluable treasure, the charge and the glory of so many former generations, should perish in our hands? that the name of christianity should, for the future, be lost in the world; or which is altogether as bad, that it should sink into an empty name, and a lifeless circle of unmeaning forms? Yet, humanly speaking, this must be the consequence, if you, and others of the rising generation, will not heartily engage in the interests of it.

Such a variety of arguments concur to prove the great importance of the rising generation. They are so plain and so weighty, that I cannot but think, you, my brethren, to whom I have particularly applied them, are in your consciences convinced, that they are not to be disputed.

How that conviction should work, I have not time largely to shew you; but if it be seriously and deeply impressed on your minds, you cannot long be at a loss for proper directions, amongst so many pious friends, and excellent books; especially if you consult the scripture, and seek for the teachings of the blessed Spirit. To these assistances I heartily recommend you, and omitting many other reflections, which would naturally arise, shall conclude my discourse with one, which I shall immediately address to another part of my auditory.

Reflection.—How solicitous should we be in our endeavours for the religious improvement of the rising generation, since its character appears of so great importance!

We have all our concern in the thought, but I would peculiarly recommend it to those of you, who are parents and masters, or have the education of youth under any other capacities: Imagine not, my friends, that it is an inconsiderable charge which is lodged in your hands. Providence has intrusted to you the hopes and the fears, the joys and the sorrows, of many hearts, and of many families. Future generations will have reason to applaud or detest your memory, as your present duty is regarded or neglected; and, which is infinitely more,

the Father of the spirits of all flesh will require a strict account of those precious souls which he committed to your care.

It is not for me, at this time, to direct you at large, as to the particulars of your duty with regard to them*. In the general you will easily apprehend, that some methods are to be taken to inform their minds with divine knowledge, and to impress them with an affecting sense of what they know. And if you find the work attended with great difficulty, I hope it will engage you thankfully to accept of the assistances of ministers, and other christian friends, and earnestly to implore those communications of the Spirit, which are absolutely necessary to make them effectual.

And if God have any mercy in store for so sinful a nation as ours, we may humbly hope, that, in answer to our united supplications, he will *Revive his work* amongst us *in the midst of the years*†; and, according to the tenor of his promises, *Will pour out his Spirit on our seed, and his blessing on our offspring*; so that *they may spring up* before him *as the grass, and as willows by the water-courses*; and *calling themselves by the name of Jacob, and subscribing with their hands unto the Lord*‡ may be acknowledged by him as a generation of his people. *Amen.*

* Something of this kind I have since attempted in the Sermons on the Religious Education of Children, which are now reprinted in the same form with these; though I have there been obliged to repeat some thoughts, which occur here, though in different words, and in a different view.

† Hab. iii. 2. ‡ Isa. xliv. 3—5.

SERMON II.

TO YOUNG PERSONS.

Christ formed in the Soul, the only Foundation of Hope for Eternity.

Gal. iv. 19.——*My little Children, of whom I travail in Birth again, until Christ be formed in you.*

IT was the unhappy case of Agrippa, that though *almost*, he was only *Almost, persuaded to be a christian*;* and I fear, it is now the case of many, and particularly of many young persons, who have enjoyed the advantages of a religious education. I believe it is difficult to find any amongst them, who have not been brought under some serious impressions betimes. With regard to the internal operations of the blessed spirit, as well as external means, the morning of life is generally to them, in a peculiar sense, *the day of their visitation;* and they often seem to know it, and in some measure to improve it: But in too many instances we find their *Goodness as a morning cloud, and as the early dew, which soon passeth away*†. The blossoms open fair and beautiful, and gives a very agreeable prospect of the plentiful fruits of holiness in life: But too often, when storms of temptation and corruption arise, the goodly appearance is laid in ruins; the blossoms do as it were fall to the ground, and leave the tree blasted and naked; or at best covered only with leaves of an external profession, which, however green and flourishing they may for the present be, will not at last secure it from being cut down and cast into the burning. Though they for a while had *Escaped the pollutions of the world* through lust, they are afterwards entangled and subdued; and the consequence is, they prove a scandal to religion, and a discouragement to others, till, in the end, they bring aggravated destruction on themselves; so that on the whole, as the apostle most justly observes, *It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than thus, after they have known it, to turn aside from the holy commandment*‡.

* Acts xxvi. 28. † Hos. vi. 4. ‡ 2 Pet. ii, 21.

This may be in a great measure owing to the mutability of human nature in general, and particularly to the levity and inconstancy of youth, in conjunction with the force of those temptations of life, which continually surround and press upon them. Yet I apprehend this is not all, but that it is, in part, to be charged on something defective, even in their best days, on their resting in something short of real religion, and a true saving change. Solomon had seen reason to say, *There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death**: And I believe every considerate person will be ready to own, that in order to prevent so fatal a delusion, and all the train of mischiefs which may follow upon it, great care should be taken in stating this important question; "What is the true and solid basis, on which we may securely ground our eternal hopes?" It is a question of the highest importance, and the most universal concern, both to the aged and the young; so that I trust I need not offer any apology for complying with the request of a pious and judicious friend, who recommended this subject to our consideration, at this time, and on this occasion.

In prosecution of this design, I have made choice of these words of the apostle, which I have now been reading, and which may, without offering any violence to them, be very fairly and naturally accommodated to the present purpose.

It is plain from many passages in this epistle, that the great Apostle, who had planted the christian church among the Galatians, had reason to fear, that many, who were by profession its members, were not sufficiently established in their holy faith. It is probable, that he himself had an opportunity of making but a short stay amongst them; and partly through their own negligence and prejudices, and partly through the artful attempts of false teachers, in the absence of St. Paul, they appear to have fallen into a set of notions, and a conduct which tended, not only to impair the glory, but to subvert the very foundation of the gospel, and with it the foundation of their own eternal hopes. Of this the apostle does, in a very awful manner, admonish them. He tells them, in the very beginning of his epistle, that he *Marvelled, that they were so soon removed from him that called them*, and from the principles he had taught them, *into another gospel*†. And afterwards he useth these very free and emphatical words: *O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched*, or enchanted *you, that you should not obey the truth? Are you so foolish? Having*

* Prov. xiv. 12. † Gal. i. 6.

begun in the spirit, having professed to embrace the gospel, and shewn the appearances of some common zeal for it, can *you now* hope to be *made perfect by the flesh*, or by the ritual and carnal observances of the Mosaic institution? Is it thus that you disgrace all you have done, and all you have borne for Christ? *Have you then suffered so many things in vain*?* On the whole, he tells them, he was ready to apprehend, that all the agreeable hopes, he had once entertained concerning them, would be buried in everlasting disappointment, and that it would appear, he had *Bestowed upon them labour in vain†*. Thus did he *Stand in doubt of them‡;* and that doubt pierced his heart with the most tender concern, and brought upon him, as it were a second time, those pangs of soul which he had felt on their account, when he saw them in all the ignorance and wickedness of their Gentile state. He was hardly more solicitous then, that they might be *Turned from dumb idols to the living God*, than he was now, that they might give convincing evidences that *Christ was formed in them*, i. e. that they had cordially received and digested the gospel, and that their hearts were *delivered into the mould of it§:* Which it did not appear they were, while they were thus making void the grace of God, and the righteousness of faith, by adhering to the foolish and pernicious doctrine of the necessity of seeking their justification, in part at least, by the observations of the Mosaic law.

This seems to be the most natural sense of the words of the text, where such a latitude of expression is used, as the apostle elsewhere seems to study, on purpose to render his writings universally edifying, and useful to them, whose particular circumstances in life, are widely different from those of the persons to whom they were originally addressed.

As to the introductory words, *My little children*, we cannot imagine they refer to the age of those to whom the apostle wrote. The evident design of them is, to express that kind of parental tenderness which he entertained for them, like that which a mother hath for an infant with which she travails in birth. *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, till Christ be formed in you.*

It would be easy to multiply observations from the words. I might especially take occasion to shew,—that it is possible, those that once seemed very hopeful, and still maintain an external profession, may appear, after all, in such dangerous circumstances, that judicious ministers, and other christian

*Gal. iii. 1—4. † Gal. iv. 11. ‡ Gal. iv. 20. § Rom. vi. 17.

friends, may be thrown into a great deal of perplexity and agony on their account;—and that the great thing necessary to establish their safety, and the comfort of those concerned for them, is, that the Lord Jesus Christ be formed in them.

That I may more particularly illustrate and improve the text, and take in what is most important in these remarks, I will

I. Consider several things, on which men are ready to build a false confidence, which will bring them into danger, and their judicious friends into perplexity upon their account.

II. I will endeavour to shew you, what is the only solid foundation of their own hopes, and the joys of others with regard to them; which is here expressed by *Christ formed in them.* And then,

III. I shall conclude with some more particular improvement, in proper inferences from the whole.

These are plainly matters of universal importance; but as I am now peculiarly addressing myself to young persons, I shall endeavour to fix on those thoughts, which may be most remarkably suitable to them: For I am much more concerned that my discourse may be useful, than that it may be critically regular and exact. I hope there are many amongst you, who are experimentally acquainted with the vitals of christianity, and have received from above an *Incorruptible seed**. There are others, to whom I must say with the apostle to the Galations, *I stand in doubt of you*†; and to such, I hope, I can apply myself in the language of the text, *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, till Christ be formed in you.* Pardon me, if in this instance *I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy*‡. I would endeavour, with the sincerest and tenderest affection, and with such freedom as the importance of the case requires, to guard you against those sandy foundatians, which will bury you and your hopes, deep in eternal ruins; and to direct you to the rock of ages, on which they who build shall never be ashamed.

I therefore intreat your serious attention, and would humbly ask, both for myself and you, the teachings of that blessed Spirit, whose peculiar office it is, in the most efficacious manner, to shew us our danger and our remedy; to aid the labouring minds of ministers, and to cause them to see with satisfaction

* 1 Pet. i. 23. † Gal. iv. 20. ‡ 2 Cor. xi. 2.

*The travail of their souls**, while he gives to their hearers a new birth, and immortal life, by forming Christ in them.

I. I am to caution you against the several things, on which young persons are peculiarly prone to build a false and precarious confidence.

And here let me peculiarly intreat you, as you love your souls, and value your eternal hopes,—that you trust not to the privileges of your birth,—or the rectitude of your speculations in matters of religion,—or the purity and frequency of your forms of worship, or the warmth of your passions,—or the morality of your conduct: For none of these apart, nor even all of them united, can, according to the tenor of the gospel, be sufficient for your security and happiness.

1. Trust not to the privileges of your birth and education, as the foundation of your eternal hopes.

You are, many of you, the seed of God's servants, perhaps for several succeeding generations. You may be ready to plead that you were born in his house, that you were early devoted to him in baptism, and have been brought up in the most regular and conscientious manner: You have been surrounded with holy instructions and correspondent examples from your infancy; and repeated fervent prayers, both in the family and in secret, have been sent up to heaven upon your account. These are indeed signal advantages, and you may justly rejoice in them; for in these respects you are *The children of the kingdom:* But *rejoice with trembling*, for our Lord hath told us, that it is more than a possible case, that *The children of the kingdom may be cast out*, and have their portion in *utter darkness*†. The peculiar regard shewn to *the seed of Abraham* may perhaps be abused by some of you, as an encouragement to those presumptuous hopes. But remember, that Ishmael was the son of Abraham, and Esau of Isaac; and yet neither the one, nor the other, *Inherited the blessing* of his Father. Remember that beautiful, but dreadful parable, which represents a wretched creature *in hell*, that could cry, *Father Abraham*, and yet in vain added, *Have mercy upon me, and send me but a drop of water to cool my tongue*‡. Once more, remember those emphatical words of the baptist, so expressly levelled against this arrogant presumption: *Think not*, says he, *to say within yourselves, we have Abraham for our father;*

* Isa. liii. 11. † Mat. viii. 12. ‡ Luke xvi. 24.

for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham:* As if he should have said, "The promises made to those who are the children of Abraham, respect not merely them, who are lineally descended from him, but those who are the heirs of his piety and his faith; for if God were to turn these stones into men, and to form them by his grace to a holy character and temper, such, though descended from no human parents at all, would, in the sense of the promise, be children of Abraham." And it were more reasonable to expect such a transmutation, than that God should acknowledge a *generation of vipers* as his people, because they were derived from holy ancestors. On the contrary, God directly assures us, that if the son of the most religious Father forsake the way of virtue and holiness, and prove as the *Degenerate plant of a strange vine†, in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die‡.* And surely herein *the ways of the Lord are* apparently *equal;* for it is most evident, that a long descent from God's people is a reproach and condemnation, rather than an honour, to those who abandon that good old way in which their ancestors have trod, and as it were, cut off that intail of piety, which has been the care and the glory of preceding generations.

2. Trust not to the regularity of your sentiments, in matters of religion, as the foundation of your eternal hopes.

So various are the workings of men's hearts, and the devices of Satan, that, if I mistake not, there are some that place their confidence in the strictness, and others in the latitude of their religious opinions; but the one, and the other, will appear equally vain, when considered in the view now before us.

Some may possibly persuade themselves, that their condition is secure, because their sentiments are orthodox. They live perhaps in the midst of the unbelieving and profane, and see daily contempt and derision thrown upon the blessed gospel, or its most glorious peculiarities; but through the influence of a good education, or from some other principle, short of true piety, they may nevertheless not only hold fast *The faith once delivered to the saints,* but even *contend earnestly for it§:* Nay, they are, perhaps, learned in the controversies of the time; and can indeed pronounce concerning them in a very rational and accurate manner.

If this, my friends, be the case with any of you, I congra-

* Matt. iii. 9. † Jer. ii. 21. ‡ Ezek. xviii. 10—13, 24. § Jude, ver. 3.

tulate you on the happiness of a well-informed judgment, but must caution you against mistaking it for a sanctified heart. *The mystery of faith*, as the apostle himself assures us, is, to be *held with a good conscience**: and in vain do you profess to retain the one, while you make shipwreck of the other. As precious a treasure as the knowledge of the truth is, if you go on no farther than mere speculation, it will be to you "but as a talent of gold to a man sinking in the sea, which only serves to plunge him so much the deeper in ruin†."

There are others who err on the contrary extreme. Orthodox notions are their banter, rather than their confidence. They pride themselves in having broke the shackles in which others are confined, and in seeing through the mist in which multitudes have been perplexed. They are sensible, that many things which divide the world are merely controversies about words; and are not much concerned about others in which there is a real difference, because they are well aware, that the fundamentals of religion lie in a very little room. They are confident of the innocency of error, and the safety of an honest mind under those mistakes which have been branded by the severest names. A wicked life is, in their esteem, the only dangerous heresy, and morality the only thing that is worth contending about. Charmed with their own wisdom and happiness in this freedom of thought, they look down with pity on persons under the influence of a contracted education and narrow sentiments, and possibly mingle their pity with a great deal of scorn, not to say indignation. But they are indeed themselves the objects of much juster pity, if, whilst they glory in their freedom, they are the *Servants of corruption*‡. It is certain, that the most generous speculations will no more save men of unregenerate hearts, and unholy lives, than the most rigid and severe set of notions. For notions and speculations are in their nature so far short of real goodness, that if there be nothing more than these, it matters but little what they are. Yet one cannot forbear observing a peculiar and most absurd inconsistency in the conduct of those, who think so highly of themselves, because they are possessed of this one speculation, that speculation in general is a trifle, and morality is all; as if the whole of morality consisted in bearing this testimony in its favour. I wish such a character were not almost as common, as it is for men to be bigots in defence of catholicism, and uncharitable in pleading the cause of charity. If this be the

* 1 Tim. i. 19. † Dr. Bates's Works, page 938. ‡ 2 Pet. ii. 19.

case with any of you, *Out of your own mouth must you be condemned* ;* and we may justly apply to you, in the midst of your self-applauses, those awful words of our Lord ; *If ye were* in this respect, *blind, ye would* comparatively *have no sin ;* whereas *now ye have no cloak*, or excuse, *for your sin†*.

3. Trust not in the external form of devotion, as the foundation of your great hopes for eternity.

You are, it may be, joined to a society, which not only wears the christian name, but separates itself from many other professors, under the apprehension, at least, of a more pure and scriptural worship, you perhaps so much approve and esteem this worship, as to be diligent and constant in attending on the public exercises of it, not only in its stated returns, but on occasional opportunities. You fill your places here from time to time, not merely in obedience to the commands of your parents and governors, but by your own voluntary choice. And, it may be, to these you add the forms of family-devotion morning and evening, and possibly, a few moments of daily retirement for reading and prayer. What can such religious persons have to fear ? Nay, rather, my brethren, what can you have to hope, if, while you *Draw near to God with your mouths and your lips*, you *remove your hearts far from him‡ ?* If while you *Come before him, as his people come*, and present yourselves in the posture of humble worshippers, *your heart be going after your covetousness§ ?* God hath for ever confounded such vain presumption, by declaring, that *The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to him‖ ;* and that *his* shall certainly be so, *that turns away his ear from hearing the law¶*, i. e. that refuses obedience to it. *The servant that knew his Lord's will, and did it not*, became justly liable to *be beaten with many stripes** ;* and it is not to be wondered, if, in this sense, *Judgment begin at the house of God††*, and seize first on those who affront and profane his ordinance, by making them to supersede the very things which they were originally appointed on purpose to promote.

4. Trust not to the warmth of your passions in matters of religion, as the foundation of your most important hopes.

Some of you, to whom I now speak, have perhaps experienced very bitter agonies of conscience. You have been roused from the sleep of carnal security, as by an earthquake, which has shook the very centre of your soul ; the flames of hell have

* Luke xix. 22. † John ix. 41. xv. 22. ‡ Isa. xxix. 13. §. Ezek. xxxiii. 31.
‖ Prov. xv. 8. ¶ Prov. xxviii. 9. ** Luke xii. 47. †† 1 Pet. iv. 17.

seemed, as it were, to flash in your faces; and all these mingled horrors have compelled you to cry out, "*Woe is me, for I am undone!* Oh, *what shall I do to be saved**?" And yet, to allude to the story of Elijah, the *Lord hath not been in the earthquake, or in the fire*†. Consider to what purpose the enquiry after salvation hath been made, and with what resolution it hath been pursued; otherwise you may be fatally deceived. The murderers of Stephen were *Cut to the heart* by his preaching‡; and we are sure that, if the most deep and terrifying convictions could have secured a man's salvation, the traitor Judas would have been safe, who undoubtedly felt the most violent convulsions of soul, before he proceeded to that dreadful extremity, which sealed him up under everlasting despair.

But you may have been impressed with the sweeter and the nobler passions; you have not only trembled at the thunder of the law, but rejoiced in the message of gospel-grace: The news of a Redeemer has been welcome to your souls, and *The feet of those* messengers *beautiful*, that have come to *publish peace* in his name§. You have perhaps, been melted into tears of pleasure and tenderness, when you have heard the representation of his dying love; and when the precious promises, established by it, have been unfolded, and the prospects of eternal glory displayed, your minds have been elevated and transported; so that you have hung, almost with a trembling eagerness, on the lips of the speaker, I readily acknowledge, that such as these are frequently the workings of the blessed Spirit of God, upon the souls of his chosen people; and when found in a due connection with the great effects they are designed to produce, are highly to be esteemed and rejoiced in. But remember, I entreat you, that every tear of tenderness, and every sally of joy, doth not arise from so divine a spring. You might weep at a mournful scene in a well-wrought tragedy, as you have done at the story of a Redeemer's sufferings; you might find yourselves transported with a fine poetical description of a Pagan elysium, or a Mahometan paradise, just as you have been with the views of a heavenly Canaan, which gospel ordinances have presented. Mere self-love might be the foundation of such a joy in the tidings of pardon and happiness, without the least degree of renewing and sanctifying grace; as it probably was in those hearers, represented by the *Stony ground*, who *immediately received the word with joy, but had no root, and so endured but for a while*‖.

* Isa. vi. 5. Acts xvi. 30. † 1 Kings xix. 11, 12. ‡ Acts vii. 54.
§ Isai. lii. 7. ‖ Mat. xiii. 20, 21.

But, perhaps, you will say, you are confident it is not merely self-love in you, for you have often found your mind impressed with a grateful sense of the divine goodness; so that, when you own it before God in prayer, or converse with his saints on the copious and delightful subject, your souls flow forth in love to your great benefactor, and you look up to him in the most thankful acknowledgments of his favours.—If it be a gratitude, that captivates the soul into a willing obedience, and engages you to yield yourselves as living sacrifices to God, then is Christ formed in your souls, and you are not the persons to whom I would give the alarm: On the contrary, I would rather confirm your hopes, and rejoice with you in them.—But if your gratitude does not rise to this; if it rest only in some tender emotion of mind, or some transient external expression of that emotion, I must faithfully tell you, that I fear it is only a nobler degree of that natural instinct, which causeth *The ox to know his owner, and the ass his master's crib** ! To find your spirit in this manner impressed, does indeed plainly prove that the day of your visitation is not entirely past; it proves you have not sinned yourselves into utter insensibility of soul; nay, it may possibly at length, through the communications of sanctifying grace, lead you on to real religion, and to eminent attainments in it: But at present it falls far short. I have often told you, and one can hardly repeat it too often, or insist too earnestly upon it, that there is a very wide difference between a good state, and a good frame; and that religion is not seated either in the understanding, or in the passions, but principally in the will; which in this disjoined state of human nature, is far from being always in a due harmony with either. So that, on the whole, those illuminations, or those affections, on which you are apt to lay so great a stress, are, perhaps, at best, but the preparatory workings of the Spirit upon your minds, which if they are improved aright, may leave you more hard, and more miserable, than they found you.

5. Trust not to the morality of your behaviour, as the foundation of your eternal hopes.

Morality is certainly a very excellent thing, and it were scandalous indeed for any professing christian to pour contempt upon it. Wherever this is wanting, pretences to faith and christian experience are not only vain, but insolent and detest-

* Isa. i. 3.

able. *He that committeth sin, is of the devil;* and only *he that doth righteousness, is righteous*:* Nor hath the grace of God ever savingly appeared to that man, through whatever uncommon scenes of thought he may have passed, who is not effectually *Taught* by it *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly†.* But it will by no means follow from thence, that wherever there is a sober and virtuous conduct, such a soul is *passed from death to life.* If the whole of the gospel be wrapt up in the rules of morality, *then is Christ dead in vain;* or, at least, it is in vain that the notices of his death are published to us. Beware, I intreat you, of so pernicious an error. I think myself obliged more earnestly to caution you against it, because, while the devil is attempting, on the one hand, to engage some, under the specious pretences of an evangelical spirit, to *Turn the grace of God into wantonness‡;* he seems to be insnaring others, by extolling the virtue which he hates, in order to lead them into a neglect of Christ, and his righteousness, and all the peculiarities of the gospel scheme of salvation; so that it is difficult on the whole to say, which of these devices is most destructive to the souls of men.

From my heart I rejoice to think, there are so many amongst you, my young friends, whose character in life is fair and unblemished. You *escape the* grosser *pollutions of the world;* you abhor brutal intemperance; you scorn the mean artifices of *deceit,* and *renounce the hidden things of dishonesty§;* you honour your parents and subordinate governors; you treat the ministers of Christ with respect and esteem; you are affable and courteous in your behaviour to all: And, on this account, we behold you and love you; we hope, and conclude, you are *Not far from the kingdom of heaven‖.* But, alas, if things rest here, you will never enter into it. *All these things* had *the young man* in the gospel *observed from his youth¶;* and many of you have seen, in a very large and beautiful representation, how lovely a youth was then perishing in sin**. He lacked one thing; and the lack of that was the ruin of his soul, as it will be of yours, if you are destitute of it.

I know, that they are especially in danger of being deceived here, who converse frequently with persons of an abandoned character; or who have themselves reformed some gross

* 1 John iii. 7, 8. † Tit. ii. 11, 12. ‡ Jude, ver. 4. § 2 Cor. iv. 2.
‖ Mark xii. 34. ¶ Mark x. 20. ** Dr. Watts's Works, New Edit. Vol. I. Ser. VII. VIII.

irregularities, to which they were once addicted. Comparing themselves with others, or with themselves in a more licentious and corrupt state, they pronounce a favourable sentence, and conclude they are safe and happy: But let me intreat you, my friends, that you would rather compare your hearts and lives with that perfect law of God, which cannot be repealed; weigh yourselves in that balance, and see whether you are not *found wanting* there. Review even the upright conduct of these days of your reformation, and then say, whether there be such a redundancy of merit in them as will not only answer present demands, but atone for your past offences too. You will soon be confounded on such a review. You will soon acknowledge, on an impartial examination, that *The bed is shorter than a man can stretch himself upon, and the covering narrower than he can wrap himself in**; that neither you, nor *Any living can be justified by the works of the law*†.

I will conclude this head with observing, that the instance of the blessed apostle St. Paul serves well to illustrate and confirm our discourse, in each of the particulars I have now mentioned.—Had the privileges of birth and education been a sufficient security, Paul had been secure before his conversion to christianity; for he was *Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin*, which had not like the rest, revolted from the house of David; and by his mother's side, as well as his father's, *an Hebrew of the Hebrews*‡.—If the most exalted regularity in religious notions, or the strictest formality in the externals of worship, could have secured a man, Paul had been secure; for he was, *as touching the law, a Pharisee;* he lived according to the rigour of that sect, and, both with respect to doctrines and ceremonies, was *Exceedingly zealous of the tradition of the fathers*§.—If a transport of passion in the cause of God could have secured a man, Paul had been secure; for, *concerning zeal*, or with regard to that, *he persecuted the church, and wasted it beyond measure*‖.—And lastly, if morality of behaviour could have done it, Paul had been secure; for, *Touching the righteousness which is by the law*, he was *blameless*¶. In these things, he was once so weak, and so wretched as to place a great deal of confidence; but when he was illuminated, and called by divine grace, he assures us, that *what things were gain unto him* before, *those he*

* Isa. xxviii. 20. † Rom. iii. 20. ‡ Phil. iii. 5. § Gal. i. 14.
‖ Gal. i. 13. ¶ Phil. iii. 6, 7, 8.

counted loss for Christ, i. e. he most entirely renounced all dependence upon them: *Yea doubtless*, says he, *and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord:* which naturally leads me to the second general, where

II. I am to consider, what will be a solid foundation for hope and joy, when all these precarious dependences fail.

This is, with the utmost propriety, expressed in the text by, *Christ formed in the soul;* which is exactly parallel to that phrase in Colossians, *Christ in you the hope of glory**, which is there mentioned as an epitome of the gospel, *the riches of the glory of the mystery* preached *among the gentiles*. When Paul could see, that the Galatians were brought to this, the pangs of his labouring mind would be ended, and joy and confidence would succeed: which is plainly intimated in the words of the text: And when you, my dear charge, are brought to it, parents and ministers rejoice over you, and you will have an everlasting spring of hope and joy, a solid foundation, on which to build for eternity.

Permit me therefore, a little more particularly to explain it to you; and let me intreat you to turn your thoughts inward, that you may judge, whether you have been experimentally acquainted with the temper and change, which I shall now describe, as signified by this remarkable expression in the text, *Christ formed in you.*

Now, I think, it implies these three things:—That some apprehensions of Christ have taken hold of the heart;—that the man is brought to an explicit choice of him; and deliberately enters into covenant with him;—and that, in consequence of both these, something of the temper and spirit of Christ is, by divine grace wrought in his soul. I will touch on each of these, but my time will not allow me to manage them in so copious and particular a manner as they well deserve.

1. To have Christ formed in the soul supposes, that some serious apprehensions of Christ have taken hold of the heart.

It evidently implies, that the external revelation of him hath not only been admitted as a speculative truth, but attended to as a matter of the highest concern. Previous to the forming of Christ in the soul, there must be a conviction, that we are naturally without Christ, and that, in consequence of this,

* Col. i. 27.

we are in a most unhappy condition. And this conviction must strike deep upon the heart; for till the evil of sin be felt, what can make the news of a Saviour welcome? since, as he himself has declared, *The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick**. The man in whose heart Christ is formed, has seen himself condemned by God's righteous law; has seen himself equally unable to answer its demands, or to bear up under the execution of its penalties. And feeling this to be no light matter, but the very life of his soul, he has then been engaged, with the greatest seriousness and earnestness, to cry out, *Woe is me, for I am undone*†*!* Oh, *What shall I do to be saved*‡*?* I before told you, there may be these convictions and awakenings, where Christ is never formed in the soul; and I now add, that the degree of them may be various, according to the various tempers and circumstances of different persons: But it is most evident that something of this kind must make way for the Redeemer's entrance, who *Comes to seek and to save that which was lost*§*: to bind up the broken-hearted*‖; and to *give rest to the weary and heavy-laden*¶. And I rather insist on this, because I am fully persuaded, that slight thoughts of sin, and of the misery of our natural estate by it, have been the principal cause of all the infidelity of the present age, and are daily ruining a multitude of souls.

2. The formation of Christ in the soul doth farther imply an explicit choice of him, and a deliberate entering into covenant with him.

When such a soul hears of a Redeemer, and of the way of salvation by him, exhibited in scripture, it cordially approves the scheme, as entirely worthy of its divine author; and though corrupt nature raises up a thousand *proud thoughts*, in a vain and ungrateful rebellion against it, yet they are, by almighty grace, subdued and *brought into captivity***. The man really sees such suitableness, and such an amiableness, in the blessed Jesus, under the character in which the gospel reveals him, that he judges him to be *The pearl of great price*, and as God has laid him as *the foundation stone*, he is in that view, inconceivably *precious to him*††. Far from contenting himself with applauding this plan, as regular, beautiful, and magnificent in general, the true believer is solicitous, that he may have his own share in this edifice of mercy; and that, *Coming to Christ*,

* Mat. ix. 12. † Isa. vi. 5. ‡ Acts xvi. 30. § Luke xix. 10.
‖ Isa. lxi. 1. ¶ Mat. xi. 28, 29. ** 2 Cor. x. 5. †† 1 Pet. ii. 6.

as a living stone, he himself may be one of those, who shall, on him, be *Built up for an habitation of God through the Spirit**. When he considers the Lord Jesus represented as *Standing at the door and knocking*†, it is with pleasure that he hears his voice, and opens to him, and as Zaccheus did *Receives him joyfully*‡. He regards him as *A nail fastened in a sure place*§; on which he can joyfully fix all his eternal hopes, infinitely important as he sees them to be. And while he thus anchors his soul on the righteousness, the atonement, and the intercession of a Redeemer, he humbly bows to his authority, as his *Lord and his God*‖. It is his desire to seat him on the throne of his heart, and, as it were, to put into his hand the sceptre and the sword, that all the powers of nature may be governed, and all the corruptions of it destroyed by him. In a word, as he knows that *Christ was given for a covenant to the people*¶, he deliberately sets his seal to that covenant, thereby devoting himself to Christ, and, through him, to the Father. Such are his views, his purposes, and his engagements; and by divine grace he is enabled to be faithful to them. Which leads me to add,

3. When Christ is formed in any soul, something of the temper and character of the blessed Jesus is by divine grace wrought there.

I might with ease multiply scriptures in proof of the absolute necessity of this; but it is so obvious, that you must yourselves know, how expressly it is required. You know, how plainly St. Paul has told us, that *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his***: and where this Spirit resides, *Christ dwells in the heart*††. The *Same mind*, or temper, is in such an one, *as was also in Christ Jesus*‡‡; and as he professeth to *Abide in him*, it is his care *so to walk, as Christ also walked*§§. On which account the true christian is said to have *Put on Christ*‖‖ in allusion to the hebrew phrase, of being *clothed* with any temper or affection, that greatly prevails, or governs in the soul¶¶.

It is a very pleasing, as well as useful employment, to trace the lineaments of the temper and conduct of Christ in

* Eph. ii. 22. † Rev. iii. 20. ‡ Luke xix. 6. § Isa. xxii. 23.
‖ John xx. 28. ¶ Isa. xlix. 8. ** Rom. viii. 9. †† Eph. iii. 17.
‡‡ Phil. ii. 5. §§ 1 John ii. 6. ‖‖ Gal. iii. 27.

¶¶ Thus we read of being clothed with righteousness, Job. xxix. 14. Psal. cxxxii. 9. With humility, 1 Pet. v. 5. With zeal, Isa. lix. 17. With cursing, Psal. cix. 18. With shame, Psal. cxxxii. 18, &c.

his people. Our Lord is in a peculiar sense the Son of God; but his people are, through him, taken into the same relation: For they *Have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear*, though perhaps they were once subjected to it, *but they have received the spirit of adoption**; and *Because* they *are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father*†. By this spirit a filial temper is wrought in their souls, by which their obedience to their heavenly Father, is so animated, as to be most honourable and grateful to him, as well as most easy and delightful to themselves. Under the influences of this spirit, the christian desires, it may be his character now, as he trusts it will be his happiness at last, to *Follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*‡; to follow that Jesus, who was *Holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners*§. He is indeed deeply sensible, that it is impossible for him, as his Lord did, to *Fulfil all righteousness*‖; and therefore, *When he hath done all*, he calls himself an *unprofitable servant*¶: Yet he seeth so much of the internal beauties of holiness, so much lustre and glory in the image of God, as drawn on the soul of man, that it is the great concern of his heart, and labour of his life, to pursue it. Nor would he only abstain from grosser enormities, and practise those virtues which are most honourable amongst men, and attended with the greatest secular advantage; but he would, in every respect, maintain a *Conscience void of offence***, and *Perfect holiness in the fear of God*††. He hath so affectionate a sense of the riches of the divine grace, displayed through a Redeemer, in adopting so unworthy a creature as himself to the dignity and privilege of a Son of God, that he often cries out, in raptures of holy gratitude and joy, *What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me*‡‡? Inspired with this noble principle, he searches his Father's will impartially; and when he hath discovered it, he obeyeth it cheerfully, and it is his *Meat and his drink* to perform it§§. He loves the Lord his God above all, and loves his fellow-creatures for his sake as well as his own, and entertains the highest veneration and affection for those who most heartily resemble *his Father and their Father, his God and their God.* It is his prayer, and his endeavour, that he may go *About doing good*‖‖, and be useful *To all as he hath opportunity*¶¶; that he may

* Rom. viii. 15. † Gal. iv. 6. ‡ Rev. xiv. 4. § Heb. vii. 26.
‖ Mat. iii. xv. ¶ Luke xvii. 10. ** Acts xxiv. 16. †† 2 Cor. vii. 1.
‡‡ Psal. cxvi. 12 §§ John iv. 34. ‖‖ Acts x. 38. ¶¶ Gal. vi. 10.

pass through the world with a holy moderation and superiority of soul, to *The things which are seen, and are temporal**; thankfully owning every mercy as proceeding from God's paternal love and care, and serenely submitting to every affliction, as *The cup which his Father puts into his hand*†. In a word, he desires, that in all the varieties of life he may still be intent on the views of an everlasting inheritance; humbly looking and longing *For that blessed hope*‡, yet willing patiently to wait his Father's time; having this constant expectation, and reviving assurance, that *Whether he liveth, he shall live unto the Lord, or whether he dieth, he shall die unto the Lord; so that whether he live or die, he shall be the Lord's*§.

This is the christian?—this is the man in whom Christ is formed; or, rather, these are some faint lineaments of his character. And I will venture to say, that he who cannot discern something in it, even as thus imperfectly described, which is vastly superior to that morality and decency of behaviour, which arises merely from prudential views, or from the sweetness and gentleness of a man's natural temper, is sunk below the boasted religion of nature, and must take refuge in the wretched principles of atheism, if he would pretend to form any thing of a consistent scheme. But now,

III. I must conclude with hinting at some reflections and inferences, which my time will not allow me to handle at large.

1. How important is it, that ministers should lead young persons into such views as these!

Our great and important business in life is to promote the eternal happiness of our hearers, and to lay a solid foundation of hope and joy in their souls. We have seen now, what it is and *Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*‖. Here then let all our labours centre. It is *the good old way*, in which our fathers in the ministry went, and in which they prospered. Let us follow their steps, and exert our most vigorous efforts here. Modern refinements may amuse us in our closets, but they will never feed the souls of our hearers, nor spread the triumphs of a gospel, which was *the power of God to the salvation* of thousands, before they were ever dreamt of. I hope, God is my witness that I am

* 2 Cor. iv. 18. † John xviii. 11. ‡ Tit. ii. 13.
§ Rom. xiv. 8. ‖ 1 Cor. iii. 11.

heartily concerned for the interest of virtue, if by that be meant the advancement of practical religion; but I never expected to see it promoted by the most philosophical speculations concerning its nature, or the finest harangues of its innate beauties, when the name and peculiar doctrines of Christ are thrown off, as unfashionable incumbrances of a discourse. Experienced christians, who have tasted the *Bread of life*, will not contentedly be put off with such chaff: And if we imagine that the younger part of our auditors may be trained up to a relish for it, we may, perhaps, succeed in the attempt; but I much fear, that success will be the calamity of the church, and the destruction of souls*.

2. We may learn from hence, what are the most valuable proofs of paternal affection.

Certainly there is no reason to esteem as such, that fond indulgence, which suffers ill habits to grow up in the young mind, and fears its present disturbance more than its future ruin: No, nor yet the more prudent care of providing plentiful and agreeable accommodations, for the subsistence and delight of your infant-offspring, as they advance to maturity and settlement in life. These things indeed are not to be neglected; but wretched are the children, and I will add the parents too, where this is the principal labour. Would you express a wise and religious tenderness, for which your children shall have reason to thank you in their dying moments, and to meet you with joy in the interviews of the eternal world, do your utmost that *Christ be formed in their souls;* and let them plainly see, that you even *travail in birth again*, till this happy work be accomplished. But this leads me to add,

3. What need is there of the work of the divine Spirit on the heart, in order to the laying this great foundation?

The language of the text, which speaks of *Christ formed in us*, naturally leads our thoughts to some agent, by whom the work is done; and when you consider what kind of a work it is, I appeal to your own consciences, whether it is to be thought merely a human production. Were it only a name, a ceremony, a speculation, or a passion, it would not be worth

* The author has taken a greater freedom on this head, as the discourse was delivered before several candidates for the ministry, for whom he had some peculiar concern.

a moment's dispute, whether you or we should have the glory of it. But as it is nothing less than the transformation of a corrupt and degenerate creature, into the holy image of the Son of God, it were impiety for either to arrogate it to ourselves.

Let us therefore, on the whole, learn our duty and our wisdom. Let the matter be brought to a serious and immediate review, and let us *judge ourselves* by the character described, as those that expect very shortly to be *judged of the Lord.*—If, on the examination, any of you have reason to conclude that you are strangers to it, remember that the invincible battery of the word of God demolishes all the towering hopes you may have raised on any other foundation. Let conscience then say, whether any amusement, or any business in life, be so important, as to be attended to, even for one single day, in neglect of this great concern, on which all the happiness of an immortal soul is suspended. If nothing be indeed found of greater moment, apply yourselves seriously to this, and omit no proper and rational methods of securing it. Consider the ways by which Christ usually enters into a soul, and wait upon him in those ways. Reflect seriously on your present condition ; constantly attend the instructions of his word, and the other solemnities of his worship ; and chuse to converse intimately with those, in whom you have reason to think he is already formed. But in all remember, that the success depends upon a divine co-operation, and therefore go frequently into the presence of God by prayer, go into it this day, or if possible this hour, and importunately intreat the regenerating and sanctifying influences of his Spirit, which, when you earnestly desire them, the gospel gives you such ample encouragement to expect.—But if you have reason to hope, that you have already received them, learn to what the praise should be ascribed ; and let it animate you to pray, that through farther communications from the throne of grace, you may be made continually more and more like to your Redeemer, till you are prepared for that world, where you shall shine forth in his complete resemblance, and shall find it your complete and eternal felicity. *Amen.*

SERMON III.

TO YOUNG PERSONS.

A Dissuasive from keeping bad Company.

Prov. iv. 14, 15.—*Enter not into the Path of the Wicked, and go not in the Way of evil Men: Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.*

IF we have any regard to the judgment of the wisest of men, illuminated and directed by the influences of his divine Spirit, we must certainly own, that ill company is a very dangerous snare, and that young persons should be frequently and earnestly cautioned against it. The excellent collection of moral and religious precepts contained in this book of Proverbs, was especially intended *To give subtility*, or prudence, *to the simple, and to the young man knowledge and discretion**. And as the sacred author well knew, that he should plead the cause of wisdom and piety in vain, while the voice of dissolute companions was heard, and their conversation pursued, he begins his addresses to youth with repeated cautions on this head: *My Son*, says he, *if sinners entice thee, consent thou not*†. As he proceeds in his discourse, the address grows more lively and earnest; and I am sure every attentive hearer will soon discover a peculiar energy in the words of the text. This faithful and compassionate counsellor doth not content himself with dissuading his young reader from joining with notorious offenders in their crimes, but even from *going in the way with them*, or with any other *evil men*; nay, from *entering upon it*, or even approaching it, so much as to *pass by it*, if there were not a necessity of doing it. *Enter not into the paths of sinners, and go not in the way of evil men: Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.* As if he should have said, "Shun the very place where such wretches assemble, as you would if it were infected with the most malignant and dangerous disease: And if you have unwarily taken any steps towards it, stop short, and direct your course another way."

* Prov. i. 4. † Prov. i.

Such lessons did Solomon teach; and such had he himself learnt from David his father. That pious prince, in the very entrance on the book of psalms describes the good man as one that *Walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful**: And he elsewhere speaks of the citizen of Zion, as one *In whose eyes a vile person*, far from being chosen as an intimate companion, *is contemned* while *he honours them that fear the Lord*†. Thus he delineates the holy and happy man; and he had a pleasing consciousness that this character was his own: He therefore appeals to God as a witness to it, that he had not himself, *Sat with vain persons*, and was determined that he *would not go in with dissemblers;* nay, that he was so far from seeking and delighting in their company, that *he hated the congregation of evil-doers, and would not sit with the wicked*‡: He resolutely drove them away from him, as one who knew their society would be extremely injurious to the purpose he had formed of devoting himself to a religious course: *Depart from me, ye evil-doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God*§.

The sacred writers of the New Testament recommend to us, that we should *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*‖; that we should *Not be unequally yoked* in any kind of intimate friendship *with unbelievers*¶; and that *If any do not obey the word*, we should *note such a one, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed***.

Considering such passages of scripture, as well as the reason of the thing, I think it proper at this time to pursue this subject at large, I well know, that I may succeed in this particular address, and yet leave you strangers to a saving change, and *far from the kingdom of God;* but if I cannot prevail with you to refrain from, and discard the company of sinners, I fear other admonitions will turn to very little account. In the further prosecution of the subject I will,

I. Briefly tell you, what I intend by that bad company, which I would caution you against, and how far I would urge you to avoid it.
II. Offer some considerations to deter you from it; and then,
III. Conclude with a few obvious inferences.

* Psal. i. 1. † Psal. xv. 4. ‡ Psal. xxvi. 4, 5. § Psal. cxix. 15.
‖ Eph. v. 11. ¶ 2 Cor. vi. 14. ** 2 Thess. iii. 14.

I. I am briefly to shew you, what I would now caution you against.

And here surely, I need not be large in telling you what I mean by bad company. It is, in general, "the conversation of those, who are apparently destitute of the fear of God;" and so it takes in, not only persons of the most dissolute and abandoned characters, but those vain and worthless creatures, who manifest a neglect of religion, though free from gross and scandalous immoralities. So that what I have to say will be applicable to all sinful companions whatever; but the more notorious their vices are, the more evident will be the force of each of those arguments, by which I shall now endeavour to fortify you against their society.

Neither shall I use many words in telling you, how far you are to avoid such company: For to be sure, you cannot imagine, that I am endeavouring to dissuade you from a necessary commerce with them in the common affairs of life, and the business of your calling; since *Then*, as the apostle expresses it, *you must needs go out of the world**, considering the state of religion and morality in it. Nor would I lead you to a neglect of any offices of humanity and civility to them; for such a behaviour, instead of *adorning* the gospel, would greatly prejudice their minds against it. Least of all, would I hinder you from applying yourselves to them by serious admonitions, in order to convince them of their sin and danger, and to engage them to repentance and reformation. In these views the blessed Jesus himself conversed freely with persons of the most infamous characters, though he were perfectly *Holy, harmless, undefiled*, and in that sense, *separate from sinners*†. The folly I would caution you against is, "chusing irreligious persons for your intimate friends, and delighting to spend your vacant hours in vain conversation with them." My design does not require farther explication; the great difficulty I apprehend, is, what I shall meet with while I am attempting,

II. To fortify you against the danger of such companions, and to engage you cautiously to avoid them.

When I call this the most difficult part of my work, it is not because I am at a loss for arguments, or apprehend those arguments to be either weak or obscure. A variety of considerations immediately present themselves to my mind, so plain, and yet so important, that I am confident were the matter to

* 1 Cor. v. 10. † Heb. vii. 26.

be weighed in an equal balance, a few moments would be sufficient to produce a rational conviction of what I am to prove. But oh, who can answer for the effect of such a conviction? When I consider the unaccountable inchantment, which there seems to be in such company as I am warning you against; and reflect on the instances, in which I have seen young persons of sense and education, who once appeared to promise remarkably well, at length intangled, and some of them ruined by it; I dare not presume on the success I might otherwise expect. Nevertheless I know, that *The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword;* and I know, that if it be guided by the hand of the blessed spirit, it will be effectual to divide you from your most delightful carnal associates; since it can *separate* things as near to each other, as the joints and the *marrow*, and lay open *the heart* to so clear a view, as that it shall seem to have *discerned* even *its thoughts and intentions**.

It is this encourages me to make the attempt, and I hope the difficulty and importance of the case will not only excuse my handling it at large, but will also engage all, who have any regard to the happiness of the rising generation, to lift up their hearts to God, that he may assist and succeed me in pleading this weighty cause, in which the interests of time and eternity are so apparently concerned.

Give me leave then to bespeak the most serious attention of all that hear me, and especially of the younger part of my audience, while I urge on your consciences such considerations as these.—Seriously reflect on the many unhappy consequences which will attend your *going in the way of sinners*:—Think on those entertainments and pleasures which you give up for the sake of their society:—And consider how little advantage you can expect from thence, to counter-balance the pleasures you resign, and the evils you incur by it.

1. Let me intreat you seriously to reflect on the many unhappy consequences which will attend your entering into the path of the wicked, and going in the way of evil men.

You probably will by this means quickly wear out all serious impressions;—you will be exposed to numberless temptations to sin and folly,—and thrown out of the way of amendment and reformation;—and thus will be led into a great many temporal inconveniences,—till at last you perish with

* Heb. iv. 12.

your sinful companions, and have your eternal portion amongst them in hell.

(1.) By this means you will be in the ready way to lose all sense of religion, and out-grow the impressions of a serious education, if providence have favoured you with it.

If your hearts are not harder than the nether mill-stone, some such impressions were surely made in your younger years; and I believe, few that have been trained up in religious families have entirely escaped them. If these are duly improved, they will end in conversion, and glory; but, if they are resisted, they lead to greater obstinacy in sin, and throw the soul still farther from the kingdom of God. Now what can be more evident than the tendency of vain and carnal conversation to quench the blessed spirit of God, and hinder the mind from falling in with his preparatory work upon it.

I am persuaded, that if they, who are under some prevailing sense of divine things, consider how difficult they often find it to preserve those impressions on their spirits, in the company of some who appear on the whole to be serious people, even they will be afraid frequently to venture into the company of the sensual and profane. As Mr. Bolton finely expresses it*, "Throw a blazing firebrand into snow or rain, and its brightness and heat will quickly be extinguished; so let the liveliest christian plunge himself into carnal company, and he will soon find the warmth of his zeal abated, and the tenderness of his conscience prejudiced." Now, if it be so detrimental to those that have deliberately devoted themselves to the service of God, and have had some experience of the goodness of his ways, judge how much more dangerous it must be to him who has only some feeble desires, and, as yet undetermined purposes, in favour of it. Young people are extremely rash and credulous; and when you see your favourite companions neglecting serious godliness, and, perhaps, deriding it, it is a thousand to one, that you will not have courage to oppose them: You will probably, at first, be silent; and then, you will grow ashamed of your former tenderness; till at last, seduced by *The craftiness of them that lie in wait to deceive*†, you may secretly censure religion, as an unnecessary and burthensome thing, if you are not transported so far as openly to revile it, and join in the senseless and impious cry, against those that appear to be influenced by it.

* Directions for walking with God, page 10. † Eph. iv. 14.

Again, when you have been used to the pleasures of such company, and, perhaps, of that unbridled luxury which they may be ready to lead you into, you will, no doubt, lose your relish for all the entertainments of devotion. The hours you spend in the exercises of it in public, or in the family, will grow tedious, and almost insupportable to you; and you will rejoice when the dull work is over, that you may return to your beloved companions again. Thus will all regard to religion be gradually worn out of your mind: And this seems to be the argument suggested by St. Paul, to dissuade the Corinthians from being *Unequally yoked with unbelievers: For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? or what communion hath light with darkness* ?* This alone would be a very considerable evil; but it is far from being all you have to fear; for, I add,

(2.) By frequenting ill company, you lay yourselves open to many temptations, and probably will be drawn into a great deal of guilt.

You know, there is a strong force in example. "We are all," says Mr. Locke, "a kind of camelions, that take a tincture from that [which is near us†." So that, if you converse with wicked people, you will probably become like them yourselves. It is an argument, which Solomon urges against forming any peculiar intimacy with those that are passionate; and it is equally applicable to many other cases: *Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul‡.*

Alas, sinners, you are too apt to be led into guilt by your own corrupt hearts, even when you have the fairest advantages against it, amidst the wisest instructions, and the holiest examples: How forcibly then will the temptation assault you, when you see others, and those your most intimate friends, yield to it without any appearance of remorse? and when, it may be, you hear them pleading in favor of the compliance, and endeavouring to persuade you to join in the practice, as what they have themselves found delightful and advantageous?

It is no small evil for an immortal creature, who was sent into the world to serve God, and to secure a happy immortality, to live in vain, and trifle away hour after hour, in mere idleness and impertinence: Yet this is the least sin that bad company leads a man into. Unhappy as this is, would to God that it always rested here! the world would at least be more peaceful,

* 2 Cor. vi. 14. † Locke's Works, Vol. iii. page 23. ‡ Prov. xxii. 24, 25.

and your damnation, sinners, would be less intolerable. But daily observation undeniably proves, that by evil examples, and wicked companions, people generally learn gluttony and drunkenness, swearing and uncleanness. It engages them in foolish quarrels, in which they blaspheme the name of God, and injure their neighbour; and it habituates them to such extravagant ways of living, as they are forced to support by secret dishonesty, and very often by open robbery. Thus they gradually fall into those scandalous enormities, which at first they could not have thought of without horror. This fatal effect is plainly hinted at in Proverbs, where the wretch that abandoned himself to the society of sinners, is represented as acknowledging that he *Was almost in all evil, in the midst of the congregation and assembly**; i. e. he was so hardened in his various crimes, as not to be ashamed to commit, or at least to avow them in the most public manner.

(3.) By frequenting sinful company, you will throw yourselves out of the way of repentance and reformation.

I before observed, that you will by this means contract a disrelish for the exercises of devotion; and this will probably be attended with the neglect of those ordinances, which God hath appointed as the great means of our conversion and edification: And when these are neglected, how can you expect that God should pursue you with uncommon interpositions of his grace? That when his word is despised, and his house forsaken, he should seize you as it were by violence, amongst your dissolute companions, and convert you in your midnight revels? Your pious friends may indeed have some opportunities in private of expostulating with you; but it will require a great deal of resolution to attempt it; and when they do, they must take it as a peculiar favor, if you give them a patient hearing, and do not affront and revile them for their charitable endeavour of delivering your souls from the pit of destruction, and plucking you as *Brands out of* everlasting *burnings*†.

But if we should allow, that their importunity, or any other consideration, should sometimes bring you within the hearing of an awakening, practical sermon, and some serious impression should be made upon your minds by it, it is very probable all these convictions will wear off, as soon as you return to your

* Prov. v. 14. † Amos iv. 11.

wicked companions again. One gay, licentious hour amongst them may undo the labour of many days and weeks, and presently teach you to laugh at yourselves for the former alarm, as if every fear had been vain, and every purpose of reformation needless. And thus your hearts, will be like tempered steel, which gathers strength from every blow of the hammer, to make a more vigorous resistance to the next; and you will harden to all the most mollifying methods of providence and of grace, till at length you provoke the blessed spirit, so often resisted, entirely to withdraw, and so you be sealed up under final impenitency. Thus the poor foolish creature I mentioned before, who was so fond of the society of sinners, is represented as reflecting too late, that all the wisest and kindest endeavours of his friends, for his reformation, had been utterly ineffectual. *How*, says he, *have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof! I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to them that instructed me**. Thus incorrigibly disobedient will you be, if you *enter into the path of sinners, and go in the way of evil men.* In consequence of this,

(4.) You will undoubtedly find yourselves exposed to a great deal of present inconvenience and calamity, with regard to your temporal affairs.

Now, methinks, this consideration should at least have its weight with you, whose guilt it is, and whose ruin it too probably may be, to look only at those *Things which are seen, and are temporal*†. I before observed, that by frequenting ill company, you will be under strong temptations to idleness. And thus you will, in all probability, waste your substance, and shorten your days; and in the mean time lay a foundation for many diseases, which may give you an utter disrelish for all the comforts and entertainments of life, when you stand in the greatest need of relief from them. I add, that it is not at all unlikely, that the foolish quarrels, into which it may lead you, may be attended with cost or pain, and perhaps with both. And, as for your reputation, which, to a generous spirit, is one of the dearest of all temporal enjoyments, I must plainly tell you, that if you determine to take no care in the choice of your company, you must necessarily give it up; For if, almost by a miracle, you should be kept from running, with your sinful associates, into *The same excess of riot* and folly; yet the very circumstance of taking pleasure in such sort of companions

* Prov. v. 12, 13.

† 2 Cor. iv. 18.

will be enough to overthrow it, in the judgment of wise and considerate people.

Such arguments as these does Solomon use, when cautioning his young readers against so dangerous an entanglement. He pleads the many temporal inconveniences and evils which attend it, and many of which I have just been mentioning. He observes, that it tends to impoverish them: *He that follows after vain persons, shall have poverty enough**: That however it may seem the cement of friendship, it often proves the occasion of *Enmity and contention*†; for *Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babblings? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine* with the partners of their midnight debaucheries. How much the health is impaired by it, is evidently suggested when he represents the poor creature as *Mourning at last, when his flesh and his body are consumed*‡: And to add no more, he expressly tells us, that sinners by these kinds of confederacies, lay *Snares for their own blood*, and *lurk privily for their own lives*§; which he useth as an argument against complying with their proposals, when they seem most advantageous: And accordingly we see, that most of those unhappy creatures, who are the victims of public justice, and fall by the hand of the executioner, declare with their dying breath, that wicked company was the occasion of their ruin.

(5.) If you chuse the society of sinners, you will probably perish with them, and have their company in hell, as you have had it upon earth.

The probability of this dreadful consequence is but too apparent from what I have said under the former heads of this discourse. If you lose those religious impressions which were early made, if you are drawn into a great deal of sin, and thrown out of the way of repentance and reformation, what can the end of these things be? Or what can you reasonably expect, but that God should execute upon you all the fierceness of his wrath? And to cut off your vain, presumptuous hopes, and awaken you to that sense of danger, which is so absolutely necessary for your deliverance, he has expressly threatened it; and that not only in general with respect to all sinners, but particularly to such as are fond of wicked company. And it is worth your while to observe, in what language

* Prov. xxviii. 19. † Prov. xxiii. 29, 30. ‡ Prov. v. 11. § Prov. i. 18.

he threatens it: *A companion of fools shall be destroyed**. So that what Solomon says of one sort of sinful companions is justly applicable to the rest: *Their house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death*†.

Now let me intreat you to dwell upon this thought, till you feel something of the weight and the terror of it. Be sometimes asking yourselves, "How can we *Dwell with the devouring fire?* How can we lie down in *everlasting burnings*‡?" How can you endure those torments yourselves? And in what temper, and with what reflections, will you meet the partners of your guilt and folly there? And in what manner will you converse together? Alas, my friends, in those seats of horror and despair, all that rendered your intercourse on earth delightful, will be come to an eternal period. There will be no opportunities for you and them to gratify your sensual desires together: No delicious food, no intoxicating liquors, no gay tales, no cheerful songs; but instead of these, *Blackness of darkness for evermore*§; *weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*‖; *the worm that never dies, and the fire that cannot be quenched*¶.

Will it then be any relief to you, to look back on those days, which you shared in luxury, and in sin? Will your friendship still continue? And will you be endeavouring by tender condolences, and by obliging offices, to mollify and alleviate the miseries of each other? Alas, sinners, hell is not the seat of friendship, but of everlasting enmity and rage. All the wretched inhabitants will live in perpetual discord, and mutual abhorrence. And no doubt your keenest resentments will burn against those, who have been your partners in sin; as your aggravated damnation will be in part owing to them. And on the same principles, will lie for ever, continually exercising all the enlarged capacities of your minds, to increase the torments of each other. And perhaps it is the only instance, in which your desires and your attempts will be ineffectual. Oh! Sirs, when I think of the air and form of some wicked creatures when transported with passion, when I observe how venomous their speeches, and extravagantly furious all their actions are, methinks I see the most lively emblem of the society below: But alas, how much more dreadful must it be, to stand exposed to the rage and revenge of a damned spirit! Yet this is like to be your lot; and if it be, the most delightful

* Prov. xiii. 20. † Prov. vii. 27. ‡ Isa. xxxiii. 14.
§ Jude, ver. 13. ‖ Mat. viii. 12. ¶ Mark ix. 44, 46, 48.

of your companions in sin, will probably prove your fiercest tormentors.

There is reason to apprehend, that these and such as these, will be the miserable consequences of wicked company with regard to yourselves. And I might now infer from hence, that your frequenting it must be very grievous and injurious to others. I might plead against it at large, from the alarms and sorrows, to which your parents and ministers will be exposed by your pursuing it, and the mischievous influence it may have on the circumstances and characters of your own domestics, if ever you appear as heads of families, as well as of many others, with whom you are concerned. Solomon urges one of these considerations, when he says, *A companion of riotous men shameth his father**. Here would be a large field of argument; but I wave it at present, lest my discourse should swell beyond due bounds, as well as to avoid the repetition of what I was laying before you on a former occasion†.

Nevertheless, I hope you are abundantly convinced, by what has been already said, that the pernicious and dangerous consequences are many and great: Let me intreat you farther to consider,

2. How much nobler entertainment and pleasure you give up for a converse, which is like to prove so fatal to you.

I would fain persuade you, if already entangled, to *burst these bands asunder*, and to *cast away these cords from you*, which will otherwise bind you as victims to eternal wrath. And to engage you to it I would say, as the wise man doth, *Forsake the foolish and live*‡: It is not only necessary, to preserve your life; but you may likewise be assured, it would most happily improve it, and bring you to another kind of life, than what you have yet known, in comparison of which your present way of life, is but a wild distempered dream. The *Father of lies* may, perhaps, have persuaded your weak and unexperienced minds, that there is no such thing as pleasure to be found out of this inchanted circle which he has drawn about you: But did you know wherein true self-enjoyment consists, I might have declined all those awful arguments, which I have so largely been urging upon your consciences. Oh! my friends, could I but this day be so happy, as to persuade you to break the chain, and to abandon these insnaring companions, not merely from prudential, but religious considerations, I should

* Prov. xxviii. 7. † See Serm. I. ‡ Prov ix. 6.

presently, lead you into a new world. Instead of being the associates of the idle, the intemperate, and the profane, you would then converse with those who are indeed the *Excellent of the earth**, and would be able to say with David, *I am a companion of them that fear thee*, O Lord, *and of them that keep thy precepts*†. And is that a contemptible thought? What think you, if an angel were to descend from heaven to make his abode on earth, or the Lord Jesus Christ himself were to appear again in the infirmities of human flesh; with whom would that angel, or that Redeemer, chuse an intimate friendship, and as frequent converse? Your own consciences tell you, that if he were ever found amongst you, it would only be, as a physician visits an hospital, to cure others, not to delight himself. And why should you esteem that society unworthy your regard, which, you are sure, the Lord Jesus Christ would prefer? It is because you imagine it gloomy and melancholy: But that imagination proceeds from ignorance and mistake. Were you to be with them, when they are discoursing together of the things of God, as, through the divine goodness many of us have been, you might frequently discern in their countenances such marks of sweet serenity and composure, and sometimes of elevated hope, and sublime, angelic joy, as would be an occular demonstration of the pleasure, which a serious and regular mind may find in such converse. And to this you might be admitted, if, by forbearing to *enter into the ways of sinners*, you discovered the marks of a teachable disposition. For, as Solomon declares, *The ear that heareth the reproof of life*, i. e. that reproof which tends to preserve life, and to make it happy, *abideth among the wise*‡; and, as he chuseth their company, he will readily be admitted to it.

I might add, that, on this supposition, you would also know what it is to be good company to yourselves. Reflection, which is now your torment, would become your pleasure. The review of a well-ordered mind, of a prudent and religious conduct, would delight you more, than the most agreeable prospects, or harmonious music; and instead of holding your happiness, as you now do, in a servile dependence on the presence, nay, I may add, on the humour of others, even of such as are least to be depended upon, you would have it treasured up in your own breast, and, like the good man described in scripture, would be *Satisfied from yourselves*§.

Nay, which is still infinitely more, you might humbly hope,

*Psal. xvi. 3. † Psal. cxix. 63. ‡ Prov. xv. 31. § Prov. xiv. 14.

through the righteousness and grace of the Redeemer, that the blessed God, the eternal and inexhaustible source of happiness, would *Lift up the light of his countenance upon you*, and bid you welcome into his gracious presence. This is an argument which St. Paul urges, in the view in which I now mention it, when, dissuading the Corinthians from forming any intimate alliance with sinners, he pleads, that God hath said, *Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty**. And God forbid, that you should ever arrive at such a degree of impious madness, as to question, whether the favour and friendship of the majesty of heaven be preferable to the converse of a vain, sinful worm. Oh that he would grant you the visit of one hour, of one moment; and you would need nothing farther to teach you to say, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire but thee*†; none that I desire in comparison with thee; how much less in opposition to thee!

Once more, if you are companions of the saints now, you may enjoy the reviving hope, that you will shortly meet them in the presence of God above, and for ever converse together, with the greatest ardour of mutual affection, as well as the noblest improvement, both in capacity, temper, and circumstances. Nor will you there only meet your pious friends, with whom on earth you *Took sweet counsel together*, and perhaps *went to the house of God in company*‡; but you will form many new acquaintances with the most excellent and glorious of created beings; you will come *To the innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect;* nay, you will dwell for ever with *God, the judge of all, and Jesus the Mediator of the covenant*§. But surely you cannot expect a favourable reception into that blessed world, or any of the preparatory felicities I have been describing, if you resolutely adhere to foolish and wicked companions now. David would not have presumed to pray, as he doth, *gather not my soul with sinners*, if he could not have said, as in the preceding words, *I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers; I have hated the congregation of evil-doers, and will not sit with the wicked*‖. And if you think to reconcile such companions, with such enjoyments and hopes, you delude yourselves with inconsistent dreams, in direct opposition to the voice of reason, as well as of scripture. Give me leave, once more, to intreat you to consider,

* 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. † Psa. lxxiii. 25. ‡ Psal. lv 14.
§ Heb. xii. 22, 23, 24. ‖ Psa. xxvi. 4, 5, 9.

8. How little advantage you can receive from such society, to counter-balance the damage you sustain, and the happiness you forfeit for it.

I am sure it ought to be something very grand and important, for which you grieve your friends, and provoke God; for which you cut yourselves off from the most valuable enjoyments in this world, and a better, and at length plunge yourselves into *everlasting destruction.* And now shew us, I intreat you, the worthy prize; tell us what those friends are, whose company you purchase at so dear a rate; and what important offices they can do for you, to make you amends for all you must lose, and for all you must suffer on their account? Poor wretches! The most they can do, is to administer something which may gratify your appetite, or amuse your imagination, for a few transient moments. A relishing meal, a cheerful cup, a thoughtless, noisy burst of laughter, are some of the best things they can procure for you. And are these so great? Surely, if it were reasonable in any case, it is peculiarly so in this, to *Say of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth* and luxury, *what doth it*?* It is but a poor entertainment while it lasts, which Solomon elegantly compares to the useless momentary blaze of a few *Crackling thorns under a pot* †: And there is a mixture of uneasiness often attending it from a view of the consequences, which will often force itself on the mind; so that *Even in laughter, the heart is sorrowful* ‡. But if the satisfaction it gave were ever so transporting, or ever so complete, yet still it would be very contemptible, because its duration is so short. Death is continually advancing towards you, which will very shortly separate you from your chosen companions; and if the most beloved of them were waiting round your bed, they could by no means deliver you from the grave, or moderate the agonies which were bringing you thither. Even before your trembling souls are dislodged from your bodies, your relish for their converse will be entirely spoiled; so that you would think yourselves barbarously insulted by them, if, in the midst of your anguish and distress, they should offer you those entertainments which you once so fondly pursued together, and which were the cement of your precarious and short-lived friendship. Judge then, whether those things are so highly valuable, which, in the near views of eternity, you would behold with horror, rather than with pleasure; and whether your most rational fecility in both worlds is to be sacrificed to such vanities as these.

* Eccles. ii. 2. † Eccles. vii. 6. ‡ Prov. xiv. 13.

I firmly believe, that, upon such reflections as these, you must be compelled, even to your own condemnation, to confess, that, as Solomon declares, *He that followeth vain persons, is void of understanding**. And if you are convinced of it, then let me intreat you, my dear unhappy friends, who are entangled in this fatal snare, that, in the strength of divine grace, you would immediately attempt an escape. It will indeed require resolution; but, remember, it will amply reward it: And therefore determine upon it this day, that you will go no more to their assemblies of vanity, and of sin; and *When they would entice you, consent not to them*†; but rather tell them plainly and seriously, that you know and consider, that your souls are at stake; and tell them, you avoid their company now, because you dread it in hell. And who knows, but such a serious and lively admonition from those who were once their brethren in iniquity, may do more to awaken them, than many addresses from the pulpit? Who knows, but it may effectually reclaim them, and be a means of forming them to such characters, as may make their friendship as safe and as honourable, as ever it was dangerous and infamous? At least, you will have *delivered your own soul*, and may comfortably hope, *that your life will be given you for a prey*. With this solemn charge, as in the name and presence of God, I dismiss you from this head, and proceed,

III. To those reflections and inferences, with which I shall conclude the discourse.

1. If so many evils and dangers attend the pursuit of wicked company, how careful should parents and governors be, to keep young people out of the way of it!

You see from all I have been saying, how necessary this care is, if you desire they should be happy in this world, or the next. It is a dreadful charge that is brought against Eli, and a dreadful doom is pronounced upon him for it; that *His sons made themselves vile, and that he restrained them not*‡. And therefore, as you love your own souls, and those of yours, endeavour, with all possible resolution, to avoid being culpable yourselves on this account.

And here I would observe, that your care must begin very early, and that it must take a great compass. You should endeavour betimes to lay in an antidote against the future poison,

* Prov. xii. 11. † Prov. i. 10. ‡ 1 Sam. iii. 13.

by labouring to the utmost to possess their infant minds with a sense of the divine presence, a desire of pleasing God, and a dread of offending him. You should endeavour to inspire them with an abhorrence of sin, and a love to the ways and people of God. Endeavour to find out suitable company for them, and to make your own company as delightful to them as you can. Indulge them in such diversions, as duty and prudence will admit; for too rigorous a restraint from these things makes them eager to pursue them, wherever they are to be found. And if you see they begin to form an acquaintance with such as you think likely to insnare and corrupt them, first gently warn them of it, and endeavour by the easiest methods to draw them off: If those will not do, reason with them more largely on the head; lay before them the various dangers they will be exposed to, and shew them the instances of those who have been injured and ruined by such company: Instances, which, it is to be feared, you will always have near at hand: And if all this be not enough, interpose with the authority God has given you; absolutely forbid them the place and company, and let them see, by your after-conduct, that you are in good earnest in the prohibition. At the same time, endeavour to recommend religion to them in the most amiable light, that they may be convinced it carries its entertainment along with it, so that there is no need of seeking pleasure in *The paths of the destroyer*. I know this is a matter of difficulty, and requires a great deal of prudence and steadiness to conduct it aright; but I am persuaded, if parents and masters were careful in this respect, few would be ruined till they came to be at their own disposal, and the destruction of multitudes would be entirely prevented. May God graciously give you wisdom to know your duty, and faithfulness to perform it!

2. If wicked company be so pernicious, as we have heard; then how cautious should we be in the choice of a companion for life, if you are in such circumstances, as to have that choice before you.

It is evident, that, as all bad company is dangerous, so the nearer it is to us, and the more frequent the opportunities of conversing with it, the greater mischief will it probably do us. Those who are in the conjugal relation, should make it their great business and care, to assist and animate each other in the ways of God; and such is the prevalency of our sinful nature, and so many the snares and temptations of life, that, with all possible advantages our progress will be too slow, and too

frequently interrupted. What then could you expect, if you had those, not only in your houses, but in your arms too, from whom you would hardly ever hear a serious word; and who would perhaps be unwilling to give you the hearing, if you should attempt any such discourse: Nay, might possibly revile or banter you for it, and, by their impious language and wicked example, might greatly deaden religious sentiments in your own heart, and either prevent or frustrate your endeavours for communicating them to those under your care? When christians, of one sex or other, chuse such a companion for life, they seem to lie under great difficulties, and will be in imminent danger, either on the one hand, of failing in a due affection and regard, or on the other, of being perverted and ensnared by that very affection, which both the duties of the relation, and the comfort of life so evidently require. If any of you have taken this hazardous step, I have nothing to do but to advise you, to be daily looking up to God for that extraordinary prudence which your circumstances require. But this is such a situation, that I cannot forbear praying, that, as for those of you who are yet single, no considerations of beauty, wit, temper, or fortune, may ever prevail upon you to bow your necks to so unequal a yoke.

3. How much reason have you to be thankful, if God has delivered you from the snares of wicked company, and given you a relish for such as is good.

Think how easily you might have been entangled and undone. Think how many, in other respects at least your equals in wisdom and capacity, are in this instance making a foolish choice; and *Bless the Lord, who has given you counsel**. It is his mercy, that gives you serious and useful friends, and gives you a heart to value them. By their converse you may gain many advantages directly opposite to the evils I have been describing. Be humbled, that you have improved these advantages no better; and pray for the aids of divine grace, that for the future they may be more diligently regarded: And if Providence ever lead you into the company of carnal sinners, which the most pious and resolute cannot wholly avoid, labour that they may be something the better for you, and you not the worse for them; and consider all the irregularities you observe in them, as farther motives of thankfulness to God, for making

* Psal. xvi. 7.

a difference betwixt them and you, and giving you company so much more amiable than theirs. Once more,

4. Let young persons of a regular character take great heed, that they do not by insensible degrees, become dangerous companions to each other.

That social turn of mind which is natural to men, and especially to young persons, may perhaps lead you to form yourselves into little societies, particularly at this season of the year, to spend your evenings together. But let me intreat you to be cautious how you spend them. If your games and your cups take up your hours till you intrench on the night, and, perhaps, the morning too, you will, to be sure, quickly corrupt each other, and soon degenerate into a club of rakes and debauchees. Farewel then to prayer, and every other religious exercise in secret. Farewel to all my pleasing hopes of you, and to those hopes which your pious parents have entertained. You will then become examples and instances of all the evils I have so largely been describing. Plead not, that these things are lawful in themselves; so are most of those in a certain degree, which by their abuse prove the destruction of men's souls and bodies. If you meet, let it be for rational and christian conversation; and let prayer and other devotions have their frequent place amongst you. And if you say, or think, that a mixture of these will spoil the company, it is high time for you to stop your career, and call yourselves to an account; for it seems, by such a thought, that you are *Lovers of pleasure*, much *more than lovers of God**. Some of these things may appear to have a tincture of severity; but consider, whether, in present circumstances†, I could have proved myself faithful to you, and to him in whose name I speak, if I had omitted the caution I have now been giving you. I shall only add, that, had I loved you less tenderly, I had perhaps warned you more coldly of this dangerous and deadly snare. May God render the admonition as successful as I am sure it is seasonable and necessary!

* 2 Tim. iii. 4.

† N. B. The substance of this Sermon was first preached at Harborough, Dec. 25, 1725; and afterwards at Northampton, on that day eight years.

SERMON IV.

TO YOUNG PERSONS.

The young Christian invited to Communion.

Isaiah xliv. 3—5.——*For I will pour Water upon him that is thirsty, and Floods upon the dry Ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy Seed, and my Blessing upon thine Offspring; and they shall spring up as among the Grass, as Willows by the Watercourses: One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the Name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his Hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the Name of Israel.*

ON the first hearing of these words, you will easily apprehend, that they afford abundance of very proper matter for a discourse to young people; but you may perhaps be surprised when I tell you, that I shall take occasion from them to address religious youth, with a large invitation to an early attendance on the table of the Lord.

This is a surprise which I do not at all affect to give: For to press in a scripture to serve a purpose foreign to its original design, and to turn a mere allusion into an argument, is, in its degree, to *Handle the Word of God deceitfully**, and is indeed an injury to it, rather than an honour. So that I much fear, that by thus attempting to make every thing of the scripture, we shall at length come to make nothing of it: For those seemingly distant extremes approach nearer to each other, than some seem to be aware.

But I hope, my friends, you have learned to judge of the pertinency of scripture to any purpose in hand, not merely by the first sound of the words, but by an attentive view of its sense and connection; and when the words I have been reading are diligently examined, they may appear more suitable to my design, than you at first apprehended.

Though God had before been reproving Israel with great severity, and *Setting their sins in order before them*†, he intimates purposes of grace and mercy, which he yet entertained

* 2 Cor. iv. 2. † Psal. l. 21.

towards them, unworthy as they were*: And, in order to prepare them for farther favours, he promises in the words of the text, to *pour out upon them* an abundant effusion of the blessed Spirit. Now we well know, by a multitude of scriptures, which I must not particularly enumerate, that it was to be in the latter day, i. e. the gospel-times, that this glorious promise was most eminently to be fulfilled†.

The blessed effects, which were to attend its accomplishment, are described in great variety and elegance of language. They are represented by the refreshment which *water* gives *to him that is thirsty*, and which plentiful *floods* of it afford to *the dry ground*, when scorched with the summer's heat. Accordingly it is said, that they, and their offspring too, should *flourish* in religion, *like the grass* when thus abundantly refreshed, or *like willows by the water-courses*, the verdure of which is so delightful, and the growth so speedy, that no more proper emblem could have been chosen. Thus should the souls of the children flourish, through the divine blessing, on the instructions of pious parents, and other methods appointed by God for their religious improvement: And in the next words the prophet uses still greater plainness of speech, to let us know that their number should be considerable, and their resolutions for God firm and determinate. One and another, this man and that, should come and own his relation to God, should publicly enter himself into the engagements of his covenant, and put in an humble claim to the important blessing it was intended to convey: *One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name* of Israel.

Some very celebrated translators and critics understand the words which we render, *Subscribe with his hand unto the Lord*, in a sense a little different from that which our English version has given them. They would rather render them, *Another shall write upon his hand, I am the Lord's*‡; and they suppose it refers to a custom which formerly prevailed in the east, of stamping the name of the general on the sol-

* Isa. xliii. 22—28.

† Compare Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26. Zech. xii. 10. Joel ii. 28. Acts i. 17. John vii. 38, 39.

‡ The hebrew is. וזה יכתב ידו ליהוה, which the LXX translate, ετερος επιγραψει χειρι αυτου, Τω Θεω ειμι.

dier*, or that of the master on the slave†: As this name was sometimes borne on the forehead, so at other times on the hand; and it is certain that several scriptures, which may easily be recollected, are to be explained as alluding to this‡. Now from hence it seems to have grown into a custom amongst some idolatrous nations, when solemnly devoting themselves to the service of any deity to be initiated into it by receiving some marks in their flesh, which might never wear out§. This interpretation the original will certainly bear; and it here makes a very strong sense, since every true christian has a sacred and an indelible character upon him, which shall never be erased. But if we retain our own version, it will come to nearly the same, and evidently refers to a practice which was sometimes used among the jews‖, and which is indeed exceeding natural, of obliging themselves to the service of God, by setting their hand to some written articles emphatically expressing such a resolution. So that you see it must imply, that they who were, by the influences of divine grace, brought to a serious sense of religion, should, in a public and solemn manner, express their subjection to God, and their readiness to enter into covenant with him; and whatever rites should by him be appointed as the tokens of such a resolution, the text must intimate a cheerful compliance with them: For it would be most unreasonable to imagine that any,

* Sicut Milites Imperatoris Nomen in Manu scriptum habebant, Grot. Manui suæ inscribent Sacramentum Jehovæ, sicut Milites, &c. Bren. Vid. Ætius, lib. viii. cap. 12. Sigon. lib. i. cap. 8. lib. ii. cap. 5. Augustin. Epist. xx.

† Servi etiam olim Stigma Manui inustum ferebant, ex quo agnoscerentur. Mercator. See Hammond, on Rev. xiii. 15.

‡ Thus it is said, Rev. xiii. 16, 17. *That all men,—bond and free, received the mark of the beast in their right-hand, or in their foreheads; and that without it none might buy or sell:* And in another place we read of *An angel that had the seal of the living God,—to seal his servants in their foreheads*, Rev. vii. 2, 3. In allusion to this also our Lord promises, Rev. iii. 12. *I will write upon him that overcometh, the name of my God, and my new name.* On this account christians are said to be *sealed by the Spirit unto the day of redemption;* Eph. iv. 30. as by his operations God owns them as his, and secures them to himself: And to this God seems to refer, in those condescending words, Isa. xlix. 16. *I have graven Zion on the palms of my hands.* See also Ezek. ix. 4. To this custom some think St. Paul alludes, when he speaks of *The marks of Christ*, which he *bare on his body.* Gal. vi. 17. Potter's Gr. Antiq. Vol. ii. p. 7.

§ Quos Deo alicui consecrabant & initiabant, hos Stigmatibus inurebant. Pitisc. Lexic. in Inscrip. And Lucian de Deâ Syr. says, Certis Notis compunguntur omnes; alii quidem in Vola Manus, alli in Cervice, &c. The manner of doing it is described by Prudentius, περὶ στεφάν, Hymn x. ver 1076, &c. And many commentators suppose this rite to be referred to, Lev. xix. 28 *Ye shall not print any marks upon you.* See Pool's Synops. in loc, & Spencer de Leg. Hebr. lib. ii. cap. 14.

‖ Neh. ix. 38, x. 29.

of such a character, and in such circumstances, would prefer any form invented by themselves, or dictated merely by human prudence, to the express ordinance and institution of God. Now forasmuch as it is evident, that under the christian dispensation, the Lord's-supper is appointed to such purposes, the text must imply an attendance upon it; and when we see young christians presenting themselves at this holy solemnity, and joining themselves to God and his church in it, we may properly say, they *Subscribe with their hand to the Lord, and surname themselves by the name of Israel;* just as we may say, in the Old Testament phrase, that *incense is offered, and a pure offering**, when holy souls are pouring out their prayers and supplications before the throne of grace, though odours and victims no longer accompany their devotions.

I have surely said enough, and perhaps more than enough, to account for my chusing these words to introduce the discourse I have in view; in which I am to press those young persons, whose hearts God has touched by his sanctifying grace, to *subscribe*, as it were, *with their hand*, by entering themselves early into christian communion, and eating and drinking with our Lord at his table. In order to which, I shall,

I. Propose some plain and important arguments, to engage such to an early attendance on this sacred institution.
II. Answer some objections, which are most frequently urged to excuse the neglect of it: And,
III. Conclude with hinting at some reflections and inferences, which seem naturally to present themselves.

May divine grace render this attempt the means of leading many young persons into a conviction of their duty and interest, and of *Adding unto the church such as shall be saved*† !*

I. I am to offer some plain and important arguments to engage religious youth to an early attendance on the supper of the Lord.

And before I enter on these, I must intreat you to remember, that it is to religious youth only, that I address the invitation. I well know, my friends, that the sacred institution, I am now recommending, is a most awful and solemn thing. I know it was intended, not only as the commemoration of a Redeemer's dying love, but as a seal of our covenant engagements to God through him; so that to attend upon it without a sincere desire

* Mal. i. 11. † Acts ii. 47.

of receiving Christ Jesus the Lord, and devoting ourselves to him, is a profanation that renders us, in some degree, *Guilty of the body and blood of the Lord**. I am sensible that for any to approach it in so unworthy a manner, is not only in itself a sinful action, but may in its consequences, prove a snare to their own souls, a stumbling to others, and a dishonour to the church. And therefore, far from encouraging such persons to come, I should think it a very necessary duty to labour to the utmost to dissuade them from it, and, if providence gave me an opportunity, to prevent their admittance.

But I have frequently found, and I believe it has been the experience of many of my brethren in the ministry, that young persons, not only of a very sober and regular conduct, but even those who have appeared most deeply impressed with the concerns of their souls, and experimentally acquainted, so far as we can judge, with regenerating grace, have, in many instances, shewn a strange coldness to this blessed institution, and we have known not a few who have grown old in the neglect of it. I apprehend therefore, that a regard to the authority and glory of my great Master, to the comfort and improvement of your souls, and to the edification and joy of the church in general, concur to require, that I offer you, my younger friends, some public admonitions on this head; to which I now desire your very serious attention.

And here permit me more largely to plead the weight of a dying Redeemer's command, as well as the honour, the pleasure, and the various advantages of an early compliance with it.

1. The ordinance, to which I now invite you, is the known command and institution of a dying Redeemer.

I need not enlarge on the proof of what is so apparent. You undoubtedly know, that Matthew and Mark, and Luke, agree in giving us the history of its institution†. And St. Paul afterwards *received it* by express revelation *from Christ*‡, and accordingly relates it, in a very circumstantial and pathetic manner; telling us, not only that Christ commanded that this should be done in remembrance of him, but also that, by an attendance upon it, our *Lord's death is shewed forth till he come;* plainly intimating thereby, what the ends of the ordinance do farther evince, that it was to continue in the church to its remotest ages. So that on the whole, you exceedingly mistake if you

* 1 Cor. xi. 27. † Mat. xxvi. 26—28. Mark xiv. 22—24. Luke xxii. 19, 20.
‡ 1 Cor. xi. 23. & seq.

imagine this to be mere matter of choice; in any other sense, than as all the duty of a rational creature is so. Our Lord has plainly determined the matter by his own sacred authority, leaving this ordinance in charge to all his followers. I say to all, for there is no limitation as to the age of those that should attend it. It is a command to young and old, as well as to rich and poor; and all, that are capable of understanding it, are obliged to comply with it, and thereby to do their homage to their exalted Sovereign, and express their gratitude to their most generous friend. And can you in reason refuse your compliance; methinks the name of the Son of God should carry along with it an authority too great to be despised, and the name of your Redeemer a constraining love too forcible to be withstood; especially the name of a dying Redeemer. Surely, my friends, if a dying parent, or brother, had given you a charge almost with his expiring breath, you could not lightly have acted contrary to it. How much greater regard do you owe to what the blessed Jesus appointed, as the apostle most pertinently observes, *The same night in which he was betrayed* !* Had it been some hard thing that he had then enjoined, and had the reason of it been unknown, so that it had appeared as a mere arbitrary constitution, the neglect of it had been foolish and ungrateful. Had it been a more painful rite than that of initiation amongst the Jews, more laborious than their frequent journies to Jerusalem, and more costly than the sacrifices they offered there, the precept of our dying Lord had carried in it an abundant answer to all that ease or interest could have pleaded against it: How much more, when the reason is so evident, and the observation, in all respects, so easy! Judge, I pray you, whether it should be neglected. Judge, whether it be a decent thing, that when we are sitting down to break and eat bread, and to pour forth and drink wine, that we may represent the breaking of Christ's body, and the pouring forth of his blood, and seal our covenant-engagements with him, more than one half of the professing christians in the assembly should rise, and either leave the place, or withdraw to a distance from the holy table. What is this but to say, "We will now have nothing to do with the memorials of a crucified Saviour?" Will you, my friends, thus separate yourselves from us? What if others were to learn of you, and to imitate your example? Where would the ordinance quickly be? nay, where would it already have been, had this temper prevailed? Where, but in our bibles? For there it would still

* 1 Cor. xi. 23.

have stood, to condemn our ungrateful disobedience, as it condemns yours.

2. An early attendance upon this ordinance will be truly honourable to you.

I wish I could say, that the omission of it were, in the repute of the generality of professing christians, so dishonourable as it ought; but it is now grown so common, that much of the just infamy of it is worn off. Nevertheless, if we will seriously consider it, we must own, that where reason and duty require any practice, which I have already proved to be the case here, the more frequently it is neglected, the more honourable is a regard to it; as it argues a laudable fortitude of mind to oppose a prevailing evil, by which multitudes are borne away. And who, that hath any sense of generosity and goodness, would not wish to signalize himself on such an occasion as this?

I appeal to your own hearts, my brethren, even when you have divested yourselves of every sentiment of ostentation and pride, (which I would not desire to press into the service of the sanctuary) would it not afford you a rational and pious pleasure to reflect, that your fellow-christians might say, with regard to you, "These are persons who are happily distinguished from most of their companions, by obedience to God and gratitude to their Redeemer; they dare stand up for the honour of his institutions, and of his name, in the midst of all the languor, and all the impiety of a degenerate age. Far from running with others *To the same excess of riot**, they do not only secretly retire, that they may converse with God, and devote themselves to him, but they have the courage openly to appear in so good a cause. Far from being *Ashamed of Christ, or of his words, in this adulterous and sinful generation*†, they readily expose themselves to all the glorious reproach of a determinate adherence to him. Thus do they publicly declare, that their hearts are touched with a sense of his love, and inspired with resolution for his service. And as they are thus *Planted in the house of the Lord*‡, we hope they will *flourish to old age* there; so that generations, which are yet unborn, shall be refreshed by their shade, and nourished by their fruit." Thus will you, like Jabez§, be *More honourable than* all your *brethren*, if, like him, you *call upon the name of the Lord*, or, in the language of the text, *subscribe with your hand unto him.*

* 1 Pet. iv. 4. † Mark viii. 38. ‡ Psal. xcii. 13, 14. § 1 Chron. iv 9, 10.

3. Let me plead the pleasure which this ordinance affords, as a farther argument for an early attendance upon it.

If your hearts have been touched by regenerating grace, you must surely know, that communion with God through a Mediator is unutterably delightful; and must own, that when you enjoy it, your souls are *Satisfied, as with marrow and fatness**. If this be the case, I am sure you would look with an holy scorn on any sensual gratification, that could be brought into comparison with those sublime and sacred entertainments. Now, when you consider the Lord's supper as an ordinance of divine appointment, you have just reason to hope, that God will honour it with his gracious presence; nay, when you consider the nature and design of the institution, you may probably expect some peculiar sweetness and delight in it, beyond what you have hitherto known. I say not, that you can be absolutely secure of your finding it; for it becomes the sovereignty of the ever-blessed God, not to confine himself, invariably, to any method of operation; lest his agency should at length be disregarded in it, and the honour transferred to the instrument: But I speak of what may probably be found; and I think I might here appeal to all considerate persons, who know any thing of the workings of the human mind; for I persuade myself they would be compelled to allow, that a regular attendance on such a solemnity has a direct tendency to produce the most delightful sensations in a soul deeply impressed with the great principles of our christian faith.

Oh, my friends, what a scene is there opened, when, by these lively memorials of his dying love, the *Lord Jesus Christ is evidently set forth as crucified among us*† *!* Surely the spectacle must be delightful, even to creatures who are themselves perfectly innocent and holy! Surely the angels, who probably are present in the churches while the solemnity is performed, must attend it with a pleasing mixture of admiration, and of joy. "Thus," may they be ready to say to each other, "thus was the great design accomplished! In such sufferings did the Son of God expire! By such surprising steps of condescension, and of love, where apostate creatures recovered to their God! Thus was the flaming vengeance of the Divine Majesty atoned! And now he is graciously smiling upon them; and these happy souls are sitting, as around their Father's board, and anticipating the entertainments of our celestial world."

* Psal. lxiii. 5. † Gal. iii. 1.

But the guest, who is called to sit down at such a banquet, may well be supposed to feel some tender and transporting pleasure, beyond that of such an angelic spectator. "These, oh my soul," may the believer say, when the bread is broken, and the wine poured out, "these were the painful sufferings, which the blessed Redeemer endured for such a wretch as I am; for *He loved me, and gave himself for me** : *He was wounded for* my *transgressions, he was bruised for* mine *iniquities*†. All these dreadful conflicts of nature did he pass through, to avert from me that weight of wrath, which would otherwise have overwhelmed me beyond all hope of deliverance. And here are the emblems of his dying love and his living care. Here are the precious seals of that everlasting covenant established in his blood, which, as it is *Well ordered in all things, and sure*, is *all my salvation, and all my desire*‡. By these tokens doth a faithful God assure me, that my sins are pardoned, that I am admitted into his family, and intitled to all the invaluable blessings of his children. Delightful thought! I have nothing now to do, but quietly to sit down, and wait with a holy silence and tranquility of soul for the intimations of my father's will, till he calls me to dwell in his house above. Yet a little while, oh my soul, and thou shalt rise to nobler enjoyments than even these; for the bread thou hast now been eating, and the wine thou hast been drinking, are pledges of a divine banquet above, in the visible and immediate presence of the blessed Founder of this sacred feast. The security of the covenant, I have this day been sealing, will continue in full force when the bands of nature are dissolved: If I *drink no more* with my Saviour *of this fruit of the vine* here, *I shall drink it new with him in his Father's kingdom* §; and therefore may encounter death in the triumphant accents of good old Simeon ‖, *Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*

Through the divine goodness I hope we can say, *We speak what we know*¶, *and testify*, not only what we have heard from the experience of others, but what we *have* ourselves *tasted* and *felt:* Thus is God visiting and refreshing our souls, while we are attending at the blessed ordinance; and why will not you come, and share with us in the entertainments, so sincerely and so freely offered? Is he not saying unto you, *Eat, oh my friends, and drink; yea, drink abundantly, oh* my *beloved***?

* Gal. ii. 20. † Isa. liii. 5. ‡ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. § Mat. xxvi. 29.
‖ Luke ii. 29, 30. ¶ John iii. 11. ** Cant. v. 1.

Why then do you wrong your own souls, as well as affront his goodness, by neglecting the invitation? Would you come thus early, you might promise yourselves a peculiar welcome, and a peculiar pleasure. Many painful reflections might by this means be prevented, and the evidence of your sincerity be more happily secured; not to say, that while your spirits are brisk and active, you may feel the impressions of those sacred passions, which are so suited to this occasion, with greater energy, and greater tenderness, than could be expected under the decays of nature, in the evening of life.

I shall only add, that these divine pleasures are not limited to the happy moments, which you spend in an immediate attendance on this feast of love; but they may be renewed, and perhaps sometimes encreased, by reflection; whereas that often brings a sting along with it, more than sufficient to balance all the sweetness to be found in irregular, sensual delights.

4. An early attendance on the Lord's supper would be very useful, as well as entertaining.

It might probably be useful both to yourselves and others. I say,

1. It might be useful to yourselves in a variety of respects.

I consider that I am now speaking to them that look upon improvement in religion as their highest interest; and therefore shall only endeavour to shew you what a tendency this ordinance has to assist you in this; and that is so evident, that I need not dwell largely on particulars, which, when suggested in a few words, may furnish you with matter of ample meditation, I shall but mention then the following hints.

The preparatory exercises of devotion might be very awakening and edifying to you. The review of your conduct, which you would be taking on the approach of these solemn seasons; the prayers and praises, you would then be addressing to God, and the meditations in which your minds would be employed, would rouse you out of that lethargy, into which you may be ready to sink, and which the best of men find too frequently prevailing.

The views of a bleeding Redeemer, of a reconciled God, of a confirmed covenant, and of a world of approaching glory, which this ordinance so naturally exhibits, would strengthen, as well as delight your souls; and, by virtue of the refreshments received at these solemnities, you might be enabled to go on

your way rejoicing, and to make a sensible progress in your journey towards the heavenly Canaan.

The remembrance of those solemn engagements, with which you would then be binding your souls unto the Lord, would be a ready answer in hours of future temptation. You would start back with horror at the thought of alienating your service from a God, to whom you had so seriously and publicly devoted them; and of returning to those follies and sins, which you had in a peculiar manner covenanted against: For this would appear to be adding sacrilege and perjury to the guilt of all your other offences.

I shall only add here, that, by entering thus early into the communion of a church, you will be brought under the more immediate inspection of the pastor of it, and likewise of your christian brethren; whose faithful and tender admonitions may be of great assistance to your unexperienced youth, and happily promote your progress, both in the paths of prudence and of holiness. Nay, the very thoughts of having drawn upon you the eyes of a society, and of others too, would engage you to some more than ordinary care, that you might not incur their censure, or disappoint the expectations which many have raised of you. And, in confirmation of all this, I cannot but observe, that many of the most eminent christians, I have ever known, were found amongst those, who in their early days took this method of giving themselves to God and his people.—I might farther shew you,

(2.) That your compliance with the exhortation I am now enforcing, might be useful to others, as well as to yourselves.

This is indeed, in part, a consequence of the former, for, the more your own souls are advanced in knowledge and holiness, the more capable, and the more ready will you be, to promote the interest of Christ in the world, and to do good to those that are round about you. But I would especially lead you to consider, that your attendance itself, separate from these remoter consequences of it, might probably be useful to others.

Other young persons would, very probably, be awakened to a sense of their duty by your example; and those who are more advanced in years may be shamed out of their neglect, when they see those, who are so far below them in age, getting the start of them here. Nor have instances been wanting within the circle of our own acquaintance, where parents have been stirred up to a holy emulation, by the early zeal of their own children in this respect. It will be a joy to all that wish well to

the cause of a Redeemer, to see that God is giving him *Youth, like the drops of morning-dew**, and causing converts to flock to him, *Like doves unto their windows*† : But ministers will have a peculiar share in the pleasure, when they *See of the travel of their soul*‡, and find, that there are at least some instances, in which they do not *Labour in vain, and spend their strength for nought*§. Especially shall those of us, who are entering on the work of the Lord ‖, rejoice to meet our younger brethren at this ordinance, as it will give us encouragement to hope, that religion will not die in our hands, and be buried in the graves of our more aged friends; but will be supported and adorned by you, and transmitted to those that are yet unborn. The joy of our heart on this occasion may add vigour, as well as pleasure, to our labours; and so, through the concurrence of almighty grace may have a tendency to render them still more successful.

Let me then intreat and conjure you, by the authority of the King of glory and of grace, and by a regard to the honour, the pleasure, and the usefulness of your lives, that you no longer persist in the neglect of an ordinance so sacred, and noble, so delightful, and advantageous.

I am persuaded you must know, and own, that the arguments I have urged are both evident and weighty; and yet I fear you will find something to oppose to them, which, if it be not examined, may prevent, or at least diminish, their success. I proceed therefore,

II. To obviate some objections, which may be offered in excuse for a longer delay.

And here I shall not raise difficulties merely to canvass them, but confine myself to such objections, as I have heard some urge on this occasion; and shall briefly suggest some hints by way of answer to them. And if the enumeration be not so large, or the reply so full, as you could wish, you know where you will be always welcome to propose your scruples as freely, and to state them as amply, as you please.

1. The most obvious reply to the preceding address is, that "you fear you are not prepared for this ordinance, and therefore, apprehend, that your attendance would prove dangerous, rather than beneficial."

To this I answer; if the case be indeed thus, I have already told you, that you are not the persons to whom I have

* Psal. cx. 3. † Isa. lx. 8. ‡ Isa. liii. 11. § Isa. xlix. 4.
‖ N. B. This sermon was first preached several years ago, April 14, 1725.

been addressing. Nevertheless, give me leave to remind you, that you ought not rashly to form such a conclusion against yourselves. I am sure the matter requires a very attentive examination; and perhaps, on such a review, you may find things are not so bad as you imagine.

You say, you are not prepared: But I hope you know, that there is a great deal of difference between the nature and importance of an actual and habitual preparation. It is plain that actual preparation consists in those extraordinary devotions, which, when opportunity permits, we should use in our approach to this sacrament; and therefore supposes such an approach to be determined, and consequently there can be no room, in the present case, to object the want of that.

But you fear that you are not habitually prepared i. e. that you are not persons of such a temper and character, as Christ the great Lord of the feast, has invited, and will welcome to it. To determine that, consider the purposes for which the ordinance was appointed, and observe how far your present temper corresponds to them. It was appointed to commemorate the death of Christ, and in this view, all are fit for it, who regard him as the great atoning sacrifice, and desire that their hearts may be affected, and their lives influenced, by a sense of his dying love. It is a pledge of our mutual affection to each other, even to all our brethren in the Lord; and in this respect, all are prepared for it, whose hearts are divested of all turbulent and unfriendly passions, and overflow with undissembled charity and diffusive benevolence. True, will you perhaps say; but is it not also designed as a seal of the covenant of grace? It certainly is; and it must be a very criminal profanation to attend it, while an alien from that covenant: Your determination therefore must turn on the answer which conscience will make, as to your readiness to enter yourselves into it. For if this be your prevailing desire, and stedfast resolution, you have not only a right to the ordinance, though it be a seal of the covenant, but its being appointed by Christ, in this view, is an additional and very weighty argument for your immediate and frequent attendance upon it. And here the question is in short this; "Do you sincerely desire to make an unreserved surrender of yourselves to God, as your owner, ruler, and supreme felicity, with an humble dependence on the mediation of his Son, and the enlivening and sanctifying influences of his Spirit?" If this be your prevailing desire, and

sincere purpose, you may assure yourselves of the kindest welcome, though your graces may be attended with a great deal of imperfection and weakness. But if you are strangers to such a desire, I must allow the objection in its full force, and own, that you have no business at the table of the Lord.

Nevertheless I cannot part with you so. Oh my friends, is there nothing mournful, and, I will add, is there nothing dreadful, in such a conclusion as this? "I have no business at the table of the Lord; I have no part in this blessed repast, because I have no part in that Redeemer, whose death is commemorated there: And therefore I am shut out, by his own appointment shut out! And is not that a sad intimation with respect to what is yet to come? When I enter on the invisible and eternal state, as I this night may, will he admit me to live and reign with him in a world of glory, who would not allow me so much as an approach to his table on earth? Oh my soul it is too plain thou must be separated from his blissful presence, and driven to an eternal distance, whence thou wilt behold with despairing eyes these pious souls, who *have eaten and drunk* with him here, sitting down with him in his kingdom." This will not seem a light matter then; Oh that it might now be duly regarded!

From all this it will appear, that if this objection from an unprepared temper be true, it ought not to be lightly passed over, but should rather be seriously considered, and the removal of it, through divine assistance, immediately attempted; since, till you are prepared for this sacrament, you cannot be prepared for heaven; and consequently are in circumstances of the extremest danger, and daily walk on the precipice of eternal ruin.

But I would hope, many of you, on enquiry, find this is not your character and case. The unfitness you object will amount to no more than this; that you find grace weak and languid in your souls, though you have reason to hope you are not wholly destitute of it. And is this a just excuse for absenting yourselves from so confirming and edifying, as well as so delightful an ordinance? It is just as reasonable, as if you were to plead, "I am very faint, and therefore I will not take the most noble reviving cordial. I am very weak and therefore I will refuse the most nourishing and strengthening food." Thus much for the first objection. It is more than time that I proceed to those that remain:

2. Others fear, that "the society of christians, to which they would join themselves, may be unwilling to admit them into such a relation."

Now I must own, that if this objection be made by persons who have been notorious on account of their immoralities, and who are but lately recovered to a sense of divine things, it will not admit of an immediate answer; nor can I invite such to this sacred ordinance, till they give evidence of the reality of a change in their hearts, by an apparent reformation of life, and some steady and prevalent resolution in a religious course. In the mean time, a regard to the honour of christian society may oblige the church to be a little reserved towards such persons; and such a reserve is consistent with the greatest tenderness towards them, and the most affectionate concern, that they may not *Break the bruised reed, or quench the smoaking flax**.

But as for such young persons, or others, who have been preserved from such irregularities, whose conduct has been fair and honourable, and who have not only arrived at a competent knowledge of the great truths of christianity, but have for some time been impressed with them so that they have formed a determinate resolution for the service of God, and, it may be, for some years made trial of his ways; far be it from us, my brethren, to say one word to discourage your approach. On the contrary, we would rather invite it; for we know it is most evidently reasonable, that when *The Spirit* appears *to say, come*†, the bride, i. e. the church, should echo back the call. We know, my friends, that we are not the master of this holy feast: We know, that it is not for us to set bounds of our own about this sacred table, and say, "Thus low must you bow to us, before you take your seats there." This is a conduct which we not only abhor, as inhumanity to you, but dread, as an insolent usurpation on the rights of our common Lord. If you have indeed tasted, that the Lord is gracious, you will not sure be unwilling, with meekness and modesty, to *Give* some *reason of the hope that is in you*‡; and blessed be God, *we have not so learned Christ*§; as to make our own phrases, or forms, or any thing singular in our own experiences, or the customs of our own society, the standard by which we judge either of the faith, or the piety of our brethren.

* Mat. xii. 20. † Rev. xxii. 17. ‡ 1 Pet. iii. 15. § Eph. iv. 20.

3. You may, perhaps, farther plead, That "you fear, lest, if you should enter into the church, you should dishonour it by an unsuitable behaviour, which might bring a reproach on religion, and its blessed Author."

But give me leave to say, that this very fear argues such a tenderness, and such a humility of soul, as may in a great measure answer itself. I hope you *Go forth in the strength of the Lord*, as well as *making mention of his righteousness alone* :* and you must know, that if a bare possibility of falling into sin were to exclude from this ordinance, the most confirmed christian upon earth could not dare to approach it. But while you see your own weakness, and maintain, on the one hand, such a jealousy over yourselves, and, on the other, such a zeal for the honour of religion, it is a certain evidence, that you are not yet left of God, and a most comfortable sign, that he will *never forsake you.* Nay, I will add, that I know none more likely to prove the ornaments of a society, than those who have such humble apprehensions, lest they should prove its reproach.

4. Others may be ready to excuse their absenting themselves from this ordinance, "because it is so commonly neglected by professing christians."

Now as for this, I bless God, it is far from being a singular thing amongst us, to see the table of the Lord furnished with guests, and young christians taking their places there. I speak it with great pleasure and thankfulness. But suppose it were otherwise ; what if the neglect of this institution were much more common, both amongst the aged and the young, than it is in most worshipping assemblies ; could you have the heart to draw an argument from thence ? "My dearest friend, my most gracious benefactor, is generally neglected ; his dying command, his dying love, is in a great measure forgotten ; and therefore I will forget him, and I will neglect him." Say, christians, could a generous mind reconcile itself to such a thought ? Could a pious soul draw such a consequence as this ? Methinks the argument lies quite the contrary way : "Therefore, Oh my compassionate Saviour, will I attend with the greater solicitude, that I may, if possible, shame others out of their neglect ; or at least, may in part *supply their lack of service*, and bear my own testimony against an ungrateful generation, who call themselves thy disciples, and neglect this distinguishing badge of their profession, this gracious memorial of thy dying love."

* Psalm lxxi. 16.

5. Others may plead the "apprehensions of aggravated guilt, and ruin, if after sacramental engagements, they should apostatize from God."

To this I answer; that I hope you, my friends, are not so unacquainted with the nature of this ordinance, and the constitution of the gospel, as to imagine that it consigns us over to certain damnation, if in any instance we afterwards deviate from the paths of our duty; for if it were so, *who could be saved* ?* But it is probable, your fears refer to total apostacy. If so, I readily own, that, should this be the case, it would in a dreadful degree inflame your guilt, and aggravate your misery, that you had not only known *The way of righteousness*†, but that you had *Eaten and drunk in the presence of the Lord*‡. But have you any thoughts of drawing back from him, that you are thus cautious to avoid an instituted ordinance, merely because, in that case, it would aggravate your ruin? So would every prayer you offer, and every sermon you hear; but should that thought prevent your coming to the throne of grace, or drive you from the house of God?

Nay, to strike home, I will add, that with regard to you, my friends, the caution comes too late. I speak of those, who have not only *Tasted of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come*§, but have made trial of the ways of wisdom and piety, and have had some experience in them; and as for you, I must plainly and faithfully declare, that it is not for you, of all people in the world, to think of gentle flames, and tolerable damnation. No, my brethren, that hope, wretched as it is, *if you shall fall away*, is unavoidably cut off from you; and all your schemes must be for nothing less than certain salvation, and exalted glory. And to your comfort let me tell you, that though it is always the duty of *Him, that thinketh, he standeth, to take heed lest he fall*‖, yet you have all imaginable reason to trust the promises of an everlasting covenant, and to rely upon the great Redeemer, who hath declared, that he will *Give unto his sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand*¶, or be able to *Separate them from his love***. If then you fear the dreadful consequences of apostacy, which would, indeed, be dreadful beyond all your fears, keep near to him as the great Shepherd; and let those very fears rather engage you to an early and diligent

* Mat. xix. 25. † 2 Pet. ii. 21. ‡ Luke xiii. 26. § Heb. vi. 5.
‖ 1 Cor. x. 12. ¶ John x. 28. ** Rom. viii. 39.

attendance on this, and every other appointed method of approach, than drive you away from it. It is most reasonable to say, "Since there are so many professors, that *Draw back* even *to perdition**, I will *Wait upon the Lord*, that I may *renew my strength*†, and so be enabled to *endure to the end*‡, that I may *Receive the end of my faith* in *the salvation of my soul*§." If your fears operate thus, they may be a means of preventing the evil, of which you are so apprehensive.

On the whole, I hope, that when you weigh all I have been saying, and compare it with whatever can be objected against it, you will be convinced of your duty, and engaged to an immediate compliance with it. I have enlarged so copiously on these things, that, in the last place,

III. I can only mention two or three inferences, which will naturally arise from what I have been laying before you.

From hence we might infer, that great care ought to be taken to instruct youth in the principles of religion; that they may not be destitute of such an acquaintance with them, as is one necessary part of preparation for this ordinance, though far from being alone sufficient.

We may also infer, that more aged christians ought carefully to cultivate serious impressions, which may be made on the minds of their children, servants, and others of the rising generation, that they may be engaged to an early compliance with their duty; while, on the other hand, great care ought surely to be taken, that there be nothing rigorous and severe in the terms of admission, which may bear hard upon that modesty and tenderness of spirit, which is generally to be found in young christians, and most eminently in those of the most hopeful and amiable characters.

As for those of a more advanced age, who have lived in the continual neglect of this great and excellent institution, I hope they have long before this inferred the guilt and folly of their omission, which so evidently appears from all I have been saying, and it is attended with many other aggravations, which my time will not now permit me to mention.

I shall therefore conclude with observing, that those young persons, who, through grace, have been convinced of their duty in this instance, and brought to an early compliance with it, have abundant reason to reflect upon it with pleasure and thankfulness. I think it is one of the most important blessings

* Heb. x. 39. † Isa. xl. 31. ‡ Matt. xxiv. 13. § Pet. i. 9.

of my life, that there are many such in the church here; many who, through the divine goodness, have lately been added to it. It would not be easy for me, my dear brethren and friends, to say how great pleasure your presence and society adds to my sacrament-days; or what a delightful prospect it gives me, not only as to the comfort of my own more advanced age, but as to the support of religion here, when I am no longer amongst you. I, and our more aged friends, have reason to rejoice on this occasion; but surely you yourselves have much greater reason. Permit me to remind you, that it will be a most proper expression of your thankfulness, to labour with the utmost care to engage other young persons, your brethren and companions, to come and share with you in this feast. I hope your own experience of the pleasure and advantage which attends it, may be added to the other arguments I have been pleading. As for your own conduct, let me most affectionately intreat, and most solemnly charge you, not only by all other arguments, but by your sacramental vows; by the eyes of God, and of man, that are upon you; by all our expectations from you, and all your engagements to us; that *As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so you* would *walk in him**. And may almighty grace strengthen, and quicken you in your progress; and crown that fair morning, which is opening upon us in so hopeful, in so delightful a manner, with a long, a bright, and a prosperous day! Amen.

* Col. ii. 6.

SERMON V.

TO YOUNG PERSONS.

The Orphan's Hope.

Psalm xxvii. 10.—*When my Father and my Mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up**.

THERE are few precepts of the gospel which will appear more easy to a humane, and a generous mind, than that in which we are required to *Weep with them that weep*†. And surely there are few circumstances of private life, which will more readily command our mournful sympathy, than those of that afflicted family, to the poor remains of which you will naturally, on the first hearing of these words, direct your thoughts, and perhaps, your eyes too: The circumstances of a family, which God *Hath broken with breach upon breach*‡; of those distressed children, whose father and mother have forsaken them almost at once; and who have since been visited with another stroke, which, if alone, had been very grievous, and when added to such a weight of former sorrows, is I fear, almost insupportable.

I believe all of you, who are acquainted with the case sincerely pity them, and wish their relief; but I am under some peculiar obligations to desire and attempt it; not only on account of my public character, but as I know the heart of an orphan, having myself been deprived of both my parents, at an age, in which it might reasonably be supposed a child should be most sensible of such a loss. I cannot recollect any scripture, which was then more comfortable, as I think none could have been more suitable to me, than this which is now before us; and I the rather chuse to insist upon it, as it will naturally lead me into some reflections, which I hope, by the divine blessing, may be of general use: *When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.*

* N.B. This Sermon was preached at Ashley, in Northamptonshire, March 6, 1725, to some young persons, whose father, mother, and sister, had all died of the small-pox a few days before.

† Rom. xii. 15. ‡ Job xvi. 14.

As for the psalm from whence these words are taken, we are told in the title, that it was composed by David, but are left to conjecture the particular occasion of it. Dr. Patrick refers it to the latter end of his time, and to the combat that he had with the Philistines in his declining age; when we are told, that David waxed faint, and was in great danger of being killed by a giant, if Abishai, the brother of Joab, had not seasonably rescued him; upon which it is added, that his subjects sware, he should *No more go out to battle, lest he* should *quench the light of Israel**. To these words David is supposed to allude, when he says, *The Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear?—Mine enemies came upon me to eat up my flesh;* and *I had fainted, unless I had believed*†. But I am rather inclined to conjecture, that this psalm was composed by him in his younger years, when he was under persecution by Saul. There is not a line in it, which doth not agree to this supposition; and there are several verses, which cannot so well be accommodated to the other; especially the 12th, in which he represents his dangers as arising from false witnesses. Now it is not easy to imagine what mischief they could have done him amongst the philistines, who opposed him in a national, rather than a personal quarrel; but he expressly declares elsewhere, that the lying words of some treacherous persons had exasperated Saul against him‡; and complains of false tongues, in those psalms, which are, by their title, fixed to this period of his history§. I might add, that the words of the text seem to favour this supposition; for David doth not here say, that his father and mother had already forsaken him, but only speaks of it as what might happen. Now, as we are elsewhere told, that when David was but a lad, *His father was an old man*‖, it is very improbable, that both Jesse and his wife should have been living at the time of this philistine war, when David himself was grown old and feeble.

If this argument be of weight to fix the general occasion of the psalm, it is probable that this verse may lead us to the particular time of its composure. We are told, that when David had taken shelter at Adullam, from the violence of Saul, and had raised a band of men for his defence, he conveyed *His father and mother* to the *king of Moab*¶, desiring that, till

* 2 Sam. xxi. 15—17. † Psal. xxvii. 1, 2, 13. ‡ 1 Sam. xxiv. 9.
§ Psal. lii. 2, 3, 4. lvii. 4. and lix. 12. ‖ 1 Sam. xvii. 12. ¶ 1 Sam. xxii. 3.

providence had brought his affairs to a determination, that prince would shelter them from the fury of Saul, which might otherwise have proved fatal to them, as it had just before done to the priests of the Lord. Perhaps this was the pious reflection of David, about the time his parents were to remove; *When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up:* As if he should have said, "Though *an host* of my enemies be *encamping against me*, and the nation be rising in arms to oppose me; and though I be forced to dismiss my aged parents, at a time when I have the greatest occasion for their prudent advice, and their tender consolations; yet this is my comfort, that God is with me: He will supply what I lose in them; he *will take me up*, and nourish me as his own child, when their parental tenderness can afford me no farther support.

The words will naturally afford us these two plain remarks, which, with the improvement of them, will be the foundation of the present discourse.

I. The dearest of our relatives, and the most valuable of our friends, may possibly forsake us.

II. When good men are abandoned by their dearest friends, they may find more in God, than they have lost in them. *When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.*

I. The dearest of our relatives, and the most valuable of our friends, may possibly forsake us.

You see David speaks of it, as at least a supposable case, with regard to himself, that not only his followers, his companions and his brethren, but even *his father and his mother* might *forsake him.* All the intimacy of relation, all the endearment of affection, could not secure him from being deserted by them. And this may be our own case:—our friends may abandon us through their own unkindness,—or God may remove them by the stroke of his providence.

1. Our dearest friends may abandon us through their own unkindness.

It is the remarkable saying of one, who had made many serious reflections on this head;* "If you put so much confidence in any friend, as not to consider, that it is possible he may become your enemy, you know man but little, and perhaps may be taught to know him better to your cost." Change of cir-

* Mr. Baxter.

cumstances, contrariety of interest, our own mistakes, the misrepresentations of others, and sometimes mere caprice, and inconstancy of temper, render those indifferent, and perhaps averse to each other, who were once united in the bonds of the most endearing friendship: Nay, it is certain, that sometimes an immoderate and ungoverned fondness on both sides, may not only justly provoke God to disappoint our hopes from each other; but may prove, in its natural consequences, an occasion of mutual disgust, and perhaps of separation. For, when the mind labours under this disorder, it contracts a kind of sickly peevishness, which turns every trifling neglect into an offence, and every offence into a crime; so that men find the extremes of love and hatred more nearly connected, than they could once have believed. Sudden fear will drive away some friends when we are in danger; and a much meaner principle will lead others, who, in better days, have called themselves our friends, to abandon, and, perhaps to censure us, when, we are reduced to low circumstances, and so have the greatest need of their assistance.

Such is the vanity of human friendship: And I will add, that neither, on the one hand, the sincerity of our affection, nor the worth of our character, nor the urgency of our affairs; nor, on the other hand, the former appearance of goodness in them, nor the highest obligations of gratitude; nor yet the nearest ties of blood or alliance, can secure us from disappointment in this tender article. David and Job, under the Old Testament, and Paul, and even his blessed Master, under the New, though all such excellent persons, were forsaken, and in several respects injured, by their friends; nay, I may say as to most of them, by pious friends too. Such treatment therefore may we meet with from ours, even from those to whom we are related in the bonds of nature as well as affection.—What union can be more strict and endearing, than that of marriage? Yet you know, Job complains while he was in circumstances which might have drawn tears from the eyes of a stranger, that his wife seemed to have forgot, not only the tenderness of her sex, and the intimacy of her relation, but even all sense of common humanity towards him: *My breath*, says he, *is strange to my wife, though I intreated her for the children's sake of mine own body**.—From whom could we expect greater tenderness, than from parents to their children, especially from mothers to their infant offspring? Yet God expressly declares, what has indeed been seen in some amazing

* Job xix. 17.

instances, that this may fail. *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the child of her womb?* The little tender creature, that she has borne in her body, that she has been used to lay in her bosom; the poor innocent that never offended her, that has all his dependence upon her; whom nature would therefore prompt her most resolutely to defend, most tenderly to cherish; can she forget it? *Yea, they may forget, saith the Lord*:* This strange case may happen; it may happen in repeated instances.—Thus may our dearest friends, and even our parents themselves, abandon us through their own unkindness. But be they ever so constant and affectionate, it is certain,

2. They may be taken away from us by the stroke of divine providence.

Whilst we are in the most delightful manner conversing with our friends, God may bring us into such circumstances, that we shall see ourselves obliged in duty to quit the dearest of them, possibly even contrary to their judgment and advice, as well as their importunate intreaties; or they may see themselves obliged, on the same principles, to quit us; so that we may seldom have the opportunity of seeing each other, and enjoying the pleasure of mutual converse.

But the severest trial is, when God sees fit to remove them by death. When that awful messenger gives the summons, we must part, though ever so desirous of continuing together. *None can by any means deliver his brother* from going down to the grave, *nor give to God a ransom for him*†, though he should offer his own life under that view. Our *Fathers, where are they*‡? And, I may add, where are many of our brethren of the same age, and once in the same stations of life with ourselves? What multitudes of them are already removed by death! Perhaps more than are left behind. We have followed them to the grave, we have left them in the dust, and *Their places* that knew them, *know them no more*§: And if we are not quickly taken away ourselves, we must expect, that our breaches, will soon be multiplied upon us; and that nothing will remain of those dear creatures, whom we now behold with tenderness, and with transport, but a mournful remembrance that we once enjoyed them, and a despair of recovering them again, till we meet in the eternal world.

* Isa. xlix. 15. † Psal. xlix. 7, 8. ‡ Zech. i. 5. § Job. vii. 10.

I will only add one very obvious reflection upon this head, and then proceed to the next.

May the dearest of our friends so soon forsake us? Then how careful should we be, that we do not value them too highly, and love them too fondly?

We find in scripture, that the inconstancy, and the mortality of human nature, are each of them urged as an argument against trusting in man. Thus we are cautioned to *Take heed every one of his neighbour, and not to trust in any brother, for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders**. And elsewhere we are bid to *Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of*† ? And how indeed can we reckon on any thing as certain, which is suspended on so uncertain a life? The words of Solomon are applicable to friends, as well as to riches, when he says, *Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for* they make *themselves wings, and flee away*, often swiftly and irrecoverably, *as an eagle towards heaven*‡. To set them up as idols therefore, in the place of God, is the readiest way to provoke him to remove or imbitter them; and then our *Own iniquity*, in this respect, *will correct us*§. Our confident expectation from them will increase our perplexity and our shame, if they should forsake us through their own unkindness; and our excessive fondness for them will add new pangs to the agonies of a last separation. One way, or another, they will prove *Broken reeds*, that will not only fail and sink under us, but *will go into our hand and pierce it*‖ with a wound, which will be deep and painful, in proportion to the stress with which we have leaned upon them. On the whole, then, let us love our friends heartily, but let us love them cautiously, as changeable, and as mortal creatures; and from a conviction, that it is possible they may forsake us, let us make it our greatest care to secure an interest in such consolations, as may be a support to us when they do. Which leads me to the second observation:

II. That when good men are abandoned by their dearest friends, they may find more in God, than they have lost in them.

So David, in the text, declares his assurance, that when his father and his mother forsook him, then the Lord would take him up; i. e. would approve himself a friend and a father to him. And if we be christians indeed, we may promise our-

* Jer. ix. 4. † Isai. ii. 22. ‡ Prov. xxiii. 5. § Jer. ii. 19. ‖ Isa. xxxvi. 6.

selves all that tenderness and care from him, which David, and other saints of old, expected and found. *He hath said* to every one of us, *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee**; and for our peculiar support under the loss of the dearest and most useful relatives, he has more particularly added, *A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation*†.

When our friends are dead, we are generally more sensible of their value, than we were before: But let the tenderest heart, under the immediate impression of this severe calamity, set itself to paint the character of a departed friend in all its most amiable colours; let it reckon up all the advantages, which fondness could have taught it to hope for; and I will answer for it, that all this, and a great deal more, is to be found in God. Let the dejected orphan, that is even now weeping over the dust of a parent, yea, of both its parents, say, what these parents, in the greatest supposable advantages of character and circumstance, could have done for its support, and its consolation; and the complaints of the most pathetic sorrow shall suggest thoughts, which may serve in a great measure, to answer themselves, and to engage the mind joyfully to acquiesce in the divine care, though deserted by the best of parents, or any other friends, however hopeful or useful.

"Alas," will a dutiful and affectionate child be ready to say, in such a circumstance, "do you ask, what my parents were? They were my dearest, my kindest, my most valuable friends:—Their counsels guided me;—their care protected me;—their daily converse was the joy of my life;—their tender condolance revived me under my sorrows;—their liberal bounty supplied my necessities. Is it to be inquired, what they were? Say rather, what were they not? And now they are gone, where must I seek such friends? And how justly may I say, that my dearest comforts and hopes lie buried with their precious remains."

Let us more particularly survey each of these thoughts, and consider with how much greater advantage each of these particulars is to be found in the paternal care and favour of God.

1. Could your parents have advised you in difficulties and perplexities? God is much more able to do it.

You will perhaps say, "Our poor giddy unpractised minds

* Heb xiii. 5. † Psal. lxviii. 5.

have been hurried with a variety of schemes and projects, and we have soon found ourselves bewildered and lost; but then it has been the greatest pleasure to us to apply to our parents, from whose more advanced age, and riper experience, we might well hope for considerable assistance. We were sure they would not upbraid our ignorance, or despise us for our weakness; but would give us their best advice, with endearing tenderness, and a cordial concern for our welfare." I allow, my friends, that if they were wise and good, which we now suppose, they were valuable counsellors indeed; and that it was your duty, and your happiness, to use them as such while living, and as such to lament them, now they are here no more. Yet, were they ever so prudent, you must still acknowledge they were fallible creatures. They could only form probable conjectures concerning the future consequences of things; and as those conjectures were always precarious, so, no doubt, they were sometimes erroneous; and you were, perhaps, in some instances, misled by their mistaken apprehensions: But *the only wise God* knows the end from the beginning; his views of the most distant futurities are not conjectural, but certain; and his wisdom is far more superior to that of the most sagacious and experienced mortal, than the wisdom of such a mortal can be superior to that of an infant. It is *He that teaches man knowledge**, in whatever degree he possesses it. He instructed our parents, that they might instruct us; and he has expressly promised his direction to all those that humbly seek it. *The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way*†. You may therefore, according to his own instruction and command, cry unto him, *My father, thou art the guide of my youth*‡; and you will find him such a guide, as can give *Wisdom to the simple, and to the young man knowledge and discretion*§.

2. Could your earthly parents have protected you from injuries? God is much more able to do it.

Nature has implanted even in irrational animals such a regard to the safety of their offspring, that many of the most weak and timorous of them become strangely courageous in their defence. The little bird, that will at other times fly from every noise and every motion, will hover over her young, when they are assaulted with danger; and, rather than she will forsake them will share in their ruin. It is easy to perceive the spirit of parents

* Psal. xciv. 10. † Psal. xxv. 9. ‡ Jer. iii. 4. § Prov. i. 4.

naturally rise on the least injury that is offered to their children, even sometimes when it is only accidental, and undesigned; and all the professed enemies of their children, they of course reckon to be their own. Nor do they only watch over them in their infancy and childhood, to defend them from the many dangers which surround those tender days; but in more advanced years, they are ready to use all their power, and their influence, to shelter them from the unworthy usage, which they might otherwise expect from an ill-natured world: And I own, it is a very melancholy thing for young people to lose such a guard, at a time when they are most exposed.

But surely the defence of the Almighty must be a much juster and nobler confidence. It is amazing to observe, in how condescending a manner he expresses his care for the protection of his people. In one place he says, *He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye* *; and elsewhere; *He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust* †; i. e. he shall defend thee, as the bird shelters her little, helpless brood, from the assault of any thing, that would injure, or destroy them. And could we desire a better guard? There are many seasons when our earthly parents must of necessity be separated from us; and a thousand calamities might overtake and destroy us, even in their presence, while they stood by helpless and amazed: But God is always with his children, and as there is no danger of ours unseen by him, there can be none, from which he is not able to deliver us. When David was *forsaken by his father and mother*, and surrounded with a whole army of inhuman enemies, he speaks of this as his comfort, *The Lord is my light, and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident* ‡; for in his help I shall be safe, though I stood single against united legions.

3. Did you hope for agreeable entertainment in the company of your earthly parents? You may expect far nobler pleasure in conversing with God.

I acknowledge, there is something peculiarly delightful in the company of a wise, a pious, and an indulgent parent; and I doubt not, but many of us can easily recollect it. Even in our infant-days, when we were fondly prattling to them, we,

* Zech. ii. 8. † Psal. xci. 4. ‡ Psal. xxvii. 1, 3.

perhaps, often saw smiles of complacency sitting on their cheeks, and even tears of tenderness and pleasure rising in their eyes; especially if, with the dawnings of reason, they discovered in our minds any early impressions of religion: We can perhaps recollect the condescending air with which they talked to us, and the kind caresses which they intermingled with the discourse. And as we grew up to a riper understanding, we were still more charmed with the company of such parents. We had not only the manly pleasure of rational converse, but there was a mixture of reverence and of gratitude in our hearts, which much increased the delight. We were assured of their candour towards their children, and their prejudice in favour of what we might say; and that inspired us with spirit and cheerfulness. We were encouraged to attempt to please them, because we concluded we might easily do it; and the sense we had of the superiority on their parts, made every expression of their kindness so much the more sweet and obliging.

The loss of such conversation is indeed to be greatly lamented; and it would argue a strange mixture of stupidity and inhumanity to be unaffected with it. But still remember, that though your parents are gone, you are not left entirely alone; for, not to mention other surviving friends, your heavenly Father is with you, if it be your prevailing desire still to be with him. Though your father and your mother be removed, and you can no longer go to them, unless it be to mourn over their grave, and to mingle your tears with their dust; yet you may go to God, and with pleasure *pour out your souls before him:* And what you find in him may give a more transporting exercise to those sweet affections, which added a relish to the conversation of your earthly parents. The first imperfect accents of prayer and praise will be a pleasing offering to him. Great and glorious as he is, he will bow down an indulgent ear, through Jesus, your dear elder brother; he will smile upon your souls, and allow you a holy freedom in all the endearments of filial converse.

Your earthly parents were not always at leisure, nor always in temper to receive your visits; but wherever you are, and whatever you are doing, God's gracious eye is always on his children; his indulgent ear is always open to their addresses. You may come and tell him how heartily you love him, how affectionate a sense you have of his favours, how sincerely you are concerned for his interest in the world, and how earnestly desirous of taking every opportunity to advance it; how well

you are satisfied with his paternal care, and how cheerfully you can refer yourselves to his wise and gracious disposal. Our Lord intimates, that we may use such a holy boldness with God, when he teaches us to say, *Our Father, which art in heaven* *; and the apostle farther expresses it, when he speaks of *The spirit of adoption*, as teaching us to cry, *Abba, Father*†.

4. Could your earthly parents have pitied your sorrows and complaints? The like compassions may you expect from God, if you apply to him under the character of a Father.

It is natural for a child, when any thing grieves it, to go to its parents, and complain to them; and if they cannot redress the grievance, at least they will be ready to condole it. Now we are expressly told in the word of God, that, *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him*‡. And how much more valuable are the compassions of God, than those of our earthly parents could possibly have been! In many cases theirs was only a mourning pity, and all, that they could often do for our relief, was to sit down and weep over us; to afflict themselves with us, and to give us their company in distress: But the compassions of an almighty God can redress the grievances which he commisserates. Be our afflictions ever so many or ever so great; in sickness and in pain; in the agonies of conscience, or the agonies of death; when parents and other friends are but *Miserable comforters*§, he alone can support the soul; can soothe it into serenity and peace; and can exalt it to the most triumphant joy.

5. Could your earthly parents have supplied your wants, and have made provision for your future subsistence? God is infinitely more able and ready to do it for his children.

In our years of infancy, though we had hardly any thing we could call our own, we made ourselves easy in this, that our parents would take care of us; and sometimes the circumstances of families are such, that their care is almost all that the children have to depend upon. When this is the case, none can wonder, that it is considered as a great aggravation of the loss. But surely when God proclaims himself *A Father to the fatherless*‖, he intends to suggest some encouragement to such helpless orphans as these; and it becomes them to take the comfort of it.

* Mat. vi. 9. † Rom. viii. 15. ‡ Psal. ciii. 13. § Job xvi. 2. ‖ 1 Psal. lxviii. 5.

Earthly parents may sometimes be so indigent that they cannot, and sometimes so unkind that they will not, relieve their children, at least in such a proportion as their necessities require. But the *Most high God is the possessor of heaven and earth**, and his goodness is as extensive as his dominion; we may therefore conclude, that *He will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish*†. There is not one parent in ten thousand so unnatural, as that he should stand by, and see his child perish for hunger, while it was in the power of his hand to relieve him. Now our Lord hath taught us to argue thus, *If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things unto them that ask him*‡?

God has the estates, and the hearts of all in his hands; and therefore can, with the utmost ease, raise up friends to us in the most abandoned circumstances, who shall act the part of parents to us, and do more for us than they could have done. And it is farther to be remembered, that the bounties of God are far more excellent than those of any mortal friend could possibly be. Their bounty, be it ever so great, cannot reach beyond the grave; but *It is our Father's good pleasure to give us a kingdom*§, *incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*‖: In the believing, though distant views of which, we are rich amidst the extremest poverty, and happy in the most miserable circumstances that can be consistent with such a hope.

You see then, on the whole, how much more the good man may find in God, than he can possibly lose in the most valuable earthly parents.

It only remains, that I conclude the discourse with a few reflections on this second observation.

1. Let us thankfully acknowledge the gracious provision, which God has made to support his people under the loss of parents and friends.

We should bless his name, that he does not leave us to sink under the burthen, or at best to collect some uncertain comfort from the precarious conclusions of our unassisted reason; but that, through the blood and righteousness of his Son, he has given his plain and express promise, for the encouragement of such inconsiderable and undeserving creatures.

You, whose parents are living, ought to be thankful, that

* Gen. xiv. 19. † Prov. x. 3. ‡ Mat. vii 11. § Luke xii. 32. ‖ 1 Pet. i. 4.

God hath provided such reviving cordials for you against the mournful time when they may be taken away.

And we, who have lost our parents, and have found relief in our extremities, from such declarations as these, should recollect it with pleasure, and often repeat our songs of grateful acknowledgment.

And I will farther add, we ought not only to rejoice and to be thankful on our own account, but also on account of those afflicted friends who may receive support from such *strong consolations*. We pity children that have lost their parents, and it is delightful to see other generous persons rising up to take care of the orphans, and in some respect to make up their loss. But how much more delightful it should be to us, to hear an Almighty God proclaiming himself as their great guardian, and saying, that when their *Father and their mother forsake them, he will graciously take them up*. How should we rejoice, that when we set ourselves to comfort and encourage them, we cannot only advance our own conjectures, but can thus speak to them in the language of God himself. And indeed this reflection may be applied to all the other promises. We ought to rejoice, that our pious friends have an interest in them, and that God hath consulted their support and consolation, as well as our own.

And surely, when we are reflecting on such a promise as this, our affectionate thoughts and praises should arise to him, *In whom all the promises of God are yea and amen**. It is natural to say, "Whence is it that thou, the holy Majesty of heaven, wilt appear under such indearing and tender characters, to sinful mortals! that thou wilt speak of taking them up! of bestowing one gracious look upon them, and much more of extending an arm of mercy to raise them from that helpless condition, in which they naturally lie, like abandoned out-casts! Whence is it that thou wilt take them into thy family now, and into thy kingdom at last!" for all this is intimated in this expression: "Lord," may each of us say, "I humbly ascribe it to the riches of thy gospel-grace. I would declare it to the everlasting honour of Jesus thy Son, that it is *Through him we have received the adoption.*"

2. What an engagement should this be to young persons, to endeavour to secure an interest in God through Christ!

You must own the *consolations*, which I have now been re-

* 2 Cor. i. 20.

presenting, to be far from being *small** ; and surely, when you consider how soon the best of your mortal friends may fail, you cannot but wish for an interest in them : But you wish it in vain, unless you seek it in the gospel way : unless you deliberately and resolutely chuse God for your Father in Christ, and devote yourselves to them in the bonds of an everlasting covenant. If you refuse this, you have reason to regard him under the character of an enemy ; and to fear, that when he removes your friends, it is in judgment that he visits you with such a blow. Your hearts may justly meditate terror, if this be the case ; especially when your pious parents are taken away. You are then deprived of their prayers, their exhortations, their advices, and their examples ; and so seem to be thrown farther out of the way of repentance and reformation. And let me add, that if Almighty grace doth not prevent it, the trouble which you now feel, in being separated from such dear relations while you continue on earth, will be the smallest part of your unhappiness ; for you must finally be separated not only from all the most valuable persons you have ever known here, but, which is infinitely more, from the presence of the blessed God himself ; must fall unpitied victims of the divine justice, and be delivered over to dwell with *Your father the devil, whose works you* have chosen to *do*†. And oh ! how unutterably dreadful is it to think, that in the awful day, when this sentence is to be pronounced and executed upon you, there will not be one friend to plead in your favour ! That though your pious parents be then present, yet, in a most terrible sense, *Father and mother will then forsake you* indeed, and, instead of interposing their intreaties for you, will applaud the righteous vengeance that dooms you as obstinate rebels to eternal death ; to those abodes of distinguished misery, which are prepared for such as have broke through all the peculiar advantages, which will then be found chargeable to your account.

3. Let what I have been saying be considered by parents, as an encouragement cheerfully to leave their religious children in the hands of God, when providence shall see fit to make the separation.

When, through the riches of gospel grace, a christian parent sees his own eternal concerns so safe in a Redeemer's hands, that he can say, with respect to them, I *Desire to depart*‡ ; yet sometimes he feels reluctance mingling itself with

* Job xv. 11. † John viii. 44. ‡ Phil. i. 23.

the holy desire, when he considers that he must leave his dear children behind him; perhaps in a destitute, and always, if they be very young, in a hazardous condition. And this thought presses with peculiar weight on the minds of those who have lost the companion of their lives; as upon their decease their children will become entirely orphans. But may it not revive you, to hear, that God will be their guardian, if they be willing to chuse him as such? Surely you may be abundantly satisfied with his care. Alas! what were you yourselves, with all your parental tenderness, but instruments which God made use of for conveying some few of his favors to them? And cannot he do that by others which he hath long been doing by you? Distrust not his power or his faithfulness; but turn all your anxious care about future events, into a religious concern to do your duty to your children, and, by all the most prudent and affectionate methods of address, to lead them into the early knowledge of God in Christ; that so, through the mercies of an everlasting covenant, they may stand intitled to the special protection of an heavenly Father, who can never be separated from them; and who, as he is never unable, will never prove unwilling to help them. Once more;

4. Let distressed orphans have an immediate and frequent recourse to such supporting considerations as these.

Do not allow yourselves to suspect the truth of these *Exceeding great and precious promises**, which have now been set before you; and, for your farther encouragement, consider in how many instances they have been confirmed by experience.

There are my friends, I am sure there are, those amongst us this day, who can set our seal to the truth of what has now been spoken, and can say in the language of the text, that *when our father and our mother* did both of them *forsake us, then the Lord* actually *took us up*, and proved a most gracious parent to us. He supplied the breaches that he made, and by a train of providence, which we cannot but admire in the review, raised up other friends for us; and it may be, inspired almost with the tenderness of parents, persons who were ever unknown to us, when the last of our parents was taken away. Nay, perhaps, some of us may say, that the death of a valuable parent, which we feared would be our ruin, has proved in some of its then unthought-of consequences, on the whole, a very great mercy to us.

* 2 Pet. i. 4.

Let such reflections as these encourage you, my young friends, for whose admonition and consolation this discourse was peculiarly intended, to hope, that as your afflictions are the same, your consolations will also be the same. *Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid**. Your father and mother are dead, but your heavenly Father can never die. I would willingly hope, that it has been your early care to secure an interest in him; and I would solemnly charge it upon you, as you value your present peace or your eternal happiness, that it be the great business of your life to keep close to him; and then you may assure yourselves with the most cheerful confidence, that *He will never fail nor forsake you*†.

If therefore your hearts are almost overwhelmed within you, in the melancholy circumstances into which his providence has brought you, fly into his presence, prostrate yourselves before him with humble importunity, and turn your tears of sorrow into tears of devotion.

"Behold, Oh most compassionate Father," may you reasonably and confidently say, "behold thou hast plunged me even into the depths of distress; but blessed be thy name, thou hast not left me to sink in them, without any support. I have this day received some kind assurances from thy word, and I now intreat thee to *Remember that word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope*‡. *My father and my mother have forsaken me: Lord*, wilt thou not *take me up?* Wilt thou indeed abandon me? Wilt thou add affliction to the afflicted? the insupportable affliction of seeing myself deserted by thee, when I most evidently need thy succour? *That be far from thee*, Oh Lord, and be the unworthy suspicion far from me!—I have lost my most prudent and faithful counsellors, but I look unto thee, as the guide of my youth.—I have lost those who were once my guardians and my protectors; but I am come to take shelter *under the shadow of thy wings*.—Their eyes are closed, and their mouths are sealed up in death: No longer can they look with compassion on my sorrows; no longer can their converse cheer or delight me. Oh! may thy compassionate eye regard me, and thy comforts delight my soul! Permit me, Oh God! an humble freedom in approaching to thee, and in pouring forth all my heart in thy presence.—My parents are now returned naked to their dust, and should my wants be ever so pressing, are now incapable of affording me any relief. May thy rich bounty supply me, thy unwearied

* John xiv. 27. † Deut. xxxi. 8. ‡ Psal. cxix. 49.

providence take care of me! But, above all, withhold not thy covenant blessings, and let me share in that eternal inheritance which thou hast prepared for all thy children in Christ."

If these be the daily breathings of your souls before him, you have abundant reason to hope, that he will return an answer of peace. In all your difficulties he will wisely direct you; in all your sorrows he will compassionately relieve you; in all your dangers he will powerfully protect you; in all your wants he will bountifully supply you: In a word, you will be conducted safely, and I hope, notwithstanding this gloomy prospect, you will be conducted comfortably, through this mortal life, till you come at length *To your Father's house in peace**. And when you are arrived thither, and take a view of all the various occurrences of the way, you will see apparent reason to acknowledge, what is now so difficult to believe, that the present awful dispensation was sent with a gracious design, and that *All the paths of* your *heavenly Father* have been *mercy and truth to you*†. Amen.

* Gen. xxviii. 21. † Psal. xxv. 10.

SERMON VI.

TO YOUNG PERSONS.

The Reflections of a pious Parent, &c.

2 Sam. xviii. 33.——*And the King was much moved, and went up to the Chamber over the Gate, and wept: And as he went, thus he said; O my Son Absalom, my Son, my Son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my Son, my Son!*

AS the providence of God calls me this Day particularly to address myself to young persons, so the words I have been reading suggest some very awful thoughts, which are well suited to such an occasion. And there is one circumstance, relating to this discourse which I cannot forbear mentioning to you, because I hope it may be a means of engaging a more than common attention to it, from the auditory to which I am now speaking*.

It is this: The substance of the sermon which I am now to deliver, was drawn up some time ago, at the desire of your late reverend and worthy pastor Mr. Jennings, and preached to a society of young persons, then under his charge†. The text was chosen by him; and his tender and obliging care to assist his pupils in their first labours, engaged him to draw the plan of the discourse, and to furnish me with several of the most important thoughts which I am now to offer.

So that, I think, I may properly say, that though your eyes will no more see him, nor your ears any more hear his persuasive voice, which has so frequently, and so affectionately, addressed you from this place, yet this day by me, *He being dead, yet speaketh*‡, speaks to you young persons; to many of whom, I

* This sermon was preached at Kibworth in Leicestershire, towards the beginning of the year 1725, about eighteen months after the death of the Rev. Mr. John Jennings, who had long been minister there, and was author of those excellent discourses on preaching Christ, and experimental preaching, which have met with such great acceptance at home and abroad.

† At Hinckley, May 7, 1723. ‡ Heb. xi. 4.

fear, he hath often spoken in vain. Let me, therefore, solemnly charge you, by your veneration for the memory of so excellent a friend, as well as by the authority of God, and the importance of your eternal interests, that you give these things a diligent hearing, a serious recollection, and a religious regard. And indeed, if such a subject, introduced by such a circumstance, will not command them all, I can have very little hopes of impressing you, by what I may say in the course of my ordinary ministry amongst you.

The words of the text are the pathetic lamentation of good old David, on the death of Absalom; a favourite, but wicked son. His pious father had no doubt given him a religious education; and it is very probable, that, considering the remarkable beauty, and gracefulness of his person, he was ready to hope, that he would be endowed with virtuous and holy dispositions of soul, the correspondent beauties of the mind. But these hopes were dreadfully disappointed; for the darling, the beautiful Absalom, proved a murderer and a rebel; he *Went in unto his father's concubines, in the sight of all Israel**, and openly attempted to take away the life of him, from whom his own was derived, and by whose indulgence he had been spared, even when forfeited to justice. Yet nevertheless David had such paternal tenderness, as, under all these crying provocations, expressly to order the generals of his army, to *Deal gently with the young man Absalom, for his sake†:* But the righteous vengeance of God determined it otherwise, and, notwithstanding all his Father's fond precautions, brought him down to the grave with infamy and blood. He was snatched away by a violent and very terrible death, in the prime of his days, and the very act of his sin; and this was the occasion of those moving words, *O my son, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!*

We may charitably, and I think very reasonably suppose, that they are not only the expressions of David's natural affection, on the death of a son whom he tenderly loved; but that they arose from the views of that state on which he entered by death, which must certainly be very dreadful; so dreadful that David, whose eternal interests were secure by the promises of an everlasting covenant, would have been willing even by his own death to have delivered him from such complete and such hopeless ruin.

* 2 Sam. xvi. 22. † 2 Sam. xviii. 5.

It will be my business from these words,

I. To consider the reflections which may naturally arise in the mind of a pious parent, on the death of a wicked child. And,

II. To draw some inferences from such a survey. Oh! that all, and especially the degenerate children of religious parents, would attend with a becoming seriousness!

I. I am to consider the reflections which may naturally arise in the mind of a pious parent, on the death of a wicked child.

I cannot pretend to enumerate them all, or to describe them in such pathetic language as a bleeding heart will speak itself on so sad an occasion; but probably the chief of them may be such as these.

1. A pious parent will reflect on such an occasion, that his expectation from his child have been sadly disappointed in the past course of his life.

Parents are apt to flatter themselves with fond hopes from their infant offspring; they look upon them as the blossoms of future delight and support. They comfort themselves under the other burthens of life, and the additional cares and labours which a growing family brings upon them, by looking forward to future years, and anticipating the pleasures hereafter to arise from the duty, gratitude, and usefulness of their children, "But alas!" will the good man say; "Could I have seen what this poor creature would have proved, instead of rejoicing in his birth, I should have mourned over it as a calamity to me and my family. I promised myself other things. My heart trembled for him in the various dangers of infancy and childhood. I congratulated myself on his arrival at a more confirmed age. But *When I looked that, this pleasant plant should have brought forth grapes*, behold, *it brought forth wild grapes**. Well did Solomon say, *A foolish son is a grief to his father, and a bitterness to her that bare him*†: So, alas, have we found. Oh! how often has our authority been affronted, and our love slighted, for a mere trifle? Or when he was treating us better, what a thorn has it been to our very hearts, to think that our child was in a state of spiritual death, and on the borders of that eternal ruin, into which we have reason to fear he is now

* Isa. v. 4. † Prov. xvii. 25.

fallen. So that with regard to what is past, we have cause to say, *Blessed*, in comparison of us, *are the barren, that never bare, and the breasts that never gave suck**." These thoughts will be aggravated, when in the next place,

2. The pious parent reflects with concern on the fruitless pains he has taken for the reformation and conversion of his child.

" He that searches my heart," will the christian say, " is witness, that next to its concern for my own salvation, it knows not a more affectionate wish than this, *That Christ might be formed in* the soul of *my children*†; That how little soever of this world I could give them, they might be the children of God, and the heirs of glory. And with relation to this unhappy creature, I was not entirely wanting in such endeavours as lay in my power. What knowledge of the things of God I myself had, I was willing to communicate to him; I urged them seriously upon him; I frequently reminded him of them; and, to supply the defects of my personal instructions, I put the book of God into his hands, and engaged him in an early and constant attendance on public ordinances. When I saw him wandering in the paths of folly and sin, I endeavoured to convince him of the fatal consequences of such courses, and in the most affectionate manner to dissuade him from them. I have again and again urged him to pray for himself; and I have frequently been praying for him. I have desired that he might be remembered in our worshipping assemblies; I have borne him on my heart before God in the family and the closet, and God alone knows with what overflowing tenderness. How importunately have I pleaded, and how unwilling have I been to take any denial! But alas! all my prayers and my tears have been *like water spilt on the ground*; and in all the endeavours I have been using for his conversion and salvation, *I have been labouring in vain, and spending* my time and *my strength for nought*‡. Nay, as to him, it has proved worse than in vain; for every instruction, and every correction, every reproof, and every prayer, has aggravated his guilt, and increased his misery; so that on the whole, while I thought I was acting the kindest and most affectionate part, I was only treasuring up for my child aggravated wrath and damnation. But this leads me to add,

* Luke xxiii. 29. † Gal. iv. 19. ‡ Isa. xlix. 4.

3. That the pious parent, on such an occasion, cannot but deeply reflect on that state of everlasting ruin, into which he has reason to fear that his child is fallen.

"Oh!" will the afflicted christian say, how comparatively light would my sorrows be, if, while I am looking on the breathless corps, and mourning the disappointment of my hopes as to the present life, I could by faith look forward to a world of glory, and see the branch of my family which is cut off from earth, transplanted thither, and flourishing there: Joy would then mingle itself with my parental sorrows, and praises with my tears. But alas! I have reason to apprehend, it was cut down, that it might be cast into the burnings. On the former supposition I might have comforted myself with the thoughts of meeting my child again, of meeting him on terms of infinite advantage, no more to be separated from him. But now alas! I have not only lost my child for a while, but I have lost him for ever; for the unhappy creature died a stranger to God and Christ, and therefore what can I imagine, but that he is fallen into the hands of divine vengeance? Overwhelming thought! While he lived, my bowels yearned for him when he was under any affliction; when I saw him struggling with illness and pain, I pitied him, and I wept over him. Oh, how can I bear to think, that he is now *Tormented in that flame**, and that God is pouring forth on him the vials of his wrath! Oh! that the blood of the parent could redeem the soul of the child, how willingly, how gladly, would I part with it! *O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!*" But once more,

4. The pious parent cannot but be much distressed in such a circumstance as this, at the thoughts of meeting his child at the tribunal of Christ.

"It would be mournful," may the good man say, "to think that I should see him no more; yet, as the matter now stands, even that would be some alleviation of my distress; But the immutable decrees of God forbid it. I know, that when all *The dead, small and great, stand before his throne*†, I and my child must appear together there; and Oh! what a dreadful interview will it be! When God committed his education to my care, he did, as it were, put his soul into my hands, and at my hands will he require an account of it. And when he comes to

* Luke xvi. 24. † Rev. xx. 12.

make the enquiry, what will the issue be? Will my son accuse me, or must I be a witness against him? How terrible an office! To bear my testimony for the condemnation of one whom I tenderly loved, of one whose soul I would have died to deliver! I know I shall not dare to interpose in his favour, and plead the cause of my Saviour's enemy; or if I were so far transported by the fondness of a Father, I should plead in vain. Sooner, much sooner, would the *Mountains be removed for me, or the earth carried out of its place**, than the sentence of heaven, its final solemn sentence would be repealed. And if it must not be repealed, how shall I bear to hear it pronounced, to see it executed; to hear my own child separated by an everlasting curse from the presence of the Lord, to see the ministers of divine wrath hurrying away the helpless creature, and dragging him down to unquenchable burnings? Oh that, if no shelter must be allowed him, God would hide me in the grave till this tremendous scene of his indignation be overpast; lest the anguish of a parent mingle itself with the joys of a rising saint, and to me overcast the triumphs of the day!" Hardly can a good man refrain from such sentiments as these, though some of them be dictated by passion, rather than by reason.

After this survey of the reflections, which such a sad event might naturally produce, I would proceed to draw some inferences from it; yet I cannot but delay them for a few moments, in compassion to the sorrows of those pious parents, if any such be amongst us, whose case this has been. Are there any of you, christians, that experimentally know the anguish of such thoughts as these? Any of you, that have thus been mourning over your children, when God has on a sudden called them to his bar, with all their follies and sins on their head, without giving you any probable hope, that his grace had first recalled them to himself, and washed their souls in the blood of a Redeemer?

It grieves me, my friends, to have been forced by a sense of duty, as I have now been, so largely to represent a scene, which must call up your sorrows afresh. But permit me to remind you, that, even in this dreadful circumstance, *The consolations of God are not small*†. Your hopes in your children have been sadly blasted; but you have hopes in God, your heavenly Father, which nothing can shake. You have reason to fear, their souls are lost; but is it nothing to you to reflect, that your own are given you as a prey? And that though your *house be not so with God*, as in this respect you

* Job xviii. 4. † Job xv. 11.

could most affectionately wish it, *Yet he has made with you an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure**. As to these unhappy creatures who are now lost, you have indeed *Laboured in vain, and spent your strength for nought*; but still *your word is with the Lord, and your reward with your God*†. and you, like the faithful minister, may hope, that you shall be unto God, *A sweet savour of Christ*, not only *in them that are saved*, but even *in them that perish*‡. And as to the final interview, which appears so grievous in the prospect, remember, that you are not to carry along with you the fond instincts of nature into a world of perfection and glory. All your passions will then be refined; your wills so entirely resolved into the will of God, and your souls so completely satisfied with his presence and his love, that no creature-regards will be able to disturb their sacred serenity. You will look on the whole assembly of the enemies of God with so deep an apprehension of the malignity of their character, and of the wisdom and equity of that divine sentence by which they fall, that you will not distinguish any of them from the rest, by the sentiments of a painful compassion. Nor will your concern for them, who now lie nearest to your heart, prevent your concurrence in that song of triumph, so proper to the solemnities of that awful day: *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways thou King of saints*§. In the mean time, let the expectation of so happy an improvement of your temper, moderate the excess of your present sorrows; and when they are moderated aright, the remainder of them will be a *Sadness of the countenance, by which the heart may be made better*‖. And now,

II. I proceed to draw some inferences from the sad survey we have been taking, of the pious parent's reflections on the death of a wicked child. And hence we may infer,

1. That wicked children are acting a very cruel and unnatural part, while they are exposing their pious parents to such reflections as these.

I say it with a sorrowful heart, but so it is, that I fear there are several of you, my young friends, who live in the neglect of your own souls, and whose consciences will presently charge it upon you. How soon that awful Being, whom you now forget, may *Cut off the number of your months in the midst*¶, and add

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. † Isa. xlix. 4. ‡ 2 Cor. ii. 15. § Rev. xv. 3.
‖ Eccles. vii. 3. ¶ Job xxi 21.

you to the number of the dead, you know not; but this is certain, that if you die as you live, and your parents survive the stroke, they will feel the weight of these terrible reflections; and even now they cannot but fear them. Doubtless, if they be present here, their hearts are bleeding whilst I speak, and they are looking upon you with unknown anguish. And does not the thought grieve you, and does it not shame you? Ungrateful creatures! Are these your returns for all their bounty, for all their tenderness; to be a sword in their bowels, and to pierce their very hearts? Alas, they did not expect such scenes as these, when you hung upon them with your infant arms; when you answered their fond smiles, and lisped out the first broken accents of endearment. I wonder how you can bear the thought; I wonder you are not ashamed to be conversing with them daily, and daily receiving favours from them; while you are behaving in such a manner, that, the better they love you, the more they must be afflicted and terrified for you. Oh, that you would have compassion on them! Or, if this will not move you, Oh that you would have compassion on yourselves! For your own interest is still much more nearly concerned than theirs. Which leads me to add,

2. We may farther infer, that a dreadful counterpart to those reflections will be the portion of the ungodly child.

Alas, sinners, if your pious parents weep thus for you, how bitterly will you *Weep for yourselves! For if these things be done in a green tree, what will be done in the dry*!* If they, the children of God, perhaps even then under the smiles of their heavenly Father, and in the near views of their own complete salvation, may utter their griefs in such melting accents, what agonies will take hold of your hearts, when you are actually entered on those seats of horror and despair, to which the righteous vengeance of God has doomed you? It is impossible fully to describe them; yet something relating to them we may certainly infer from what has been already said. Give me leave to offer to your view, if peradventure, through the agency of divine grace, to have heard of these reflections may be the happy means of leading you to escape them.

Your parents now reflect, on the disappointment of their expectations from you: But Oh, how heavy will the disappointment of your own hopes and expectations then sit upon your souls! How will you then bear it, sinners, when you see all your

* Luke xxiii. 28, 31.

enjoyments and all your prospects blasted in a moment, and irrecoverably lost?

It is true, you are *Lifting up your souls unto vanity* *; but these vanities are your all. You pursue them with the utmost vigour and intenseness of mind, and have a great many fond and chimerical schemes for years of pleasure and happiness yet to come. But if God cut you off in the prime of your life, and in the very flower of your hopes, *In that day all your thoughts* will *perish* †. And how will you be confounded to see all the beautiful and enchanted scenes, that now charm you to the neglect of God and religion, vanished like the shadowy glories of a dream, and your souls left naked and destitute, upon an inhospitable shore, where, in all your indigence and distress, there will be no eye to pity you, no hand to relieve you!

And it will be so much the more dreadful, as you will go down to these melancholy regions with your appetites and your passions warm about you, and by frequent indulgence strengthened and inflamed; so that, for want of their proper objects, they will prey upon your heart, and an insatiable thirst will continue, while you will not have one drop of satisfaction or comfort. Nay, I may add, that as, in these unripened days, you have had little experience of the vanities and disappointments of life, and have entertained a great many fond and extravagant hopes of what you would never have found in it, your regret, in being cut off from them, will not be in proportion to what they really were, but to what your error and folly imagined them to have been.

Your pious parents will reflect upon it with unutterable anguish, "that your souls are for ever lost." But how much more sensibly will you yourselves feel it! They, in their present situation on earth, can have but a very faint and imperfect notion of the horrors of the infernal prison; for to those we may accommodate the language of the apostle on a very different occasion, and say, that neither has *eye seen* them, *nor ear heard* them, *nor has it entered into the* most terrified *heart* fully *to conceive* them‡. But how will the change affect you, when you are just entered on those realms of woe! when you look round about you, and think, this is my last abode, my only remaining inheritance? Alas, how will your hearts be overwhelmed, when you compare that place of torments with all the cheerful scenes of the world from whence you came; where you had been sur-

* Psal. xxiv. 4. † Psal. cxlvi. 4. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

rounded with so many delights; where it had been your chief care to make *Provision for the flesh**; and where you had, perhaps, *spent your days in mirth, till in a moment you went down to the grave*†! when, instead of the light of the sun, you see nothing but the flames of the divine indignation; when, instead of all that soothed and regaled your senses, you feel the never-dying worm, and exchange the gay and agreeable companions that now surround you, for the society of devils and damned spirits!

I appeal to your consciences; *Can your hearts endure, or your hands be strong*‡, in such a circumstance as this? You, that are so impatient of every little anxiety of life; you, that cannot bear the fatigues of duty, nor the restraints of religion, how will you bear the agonies of damnation? How will you live in those doleful regions, where joy and cheerfulness are everlasting strangers, and nothing remains but *Weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth*§?

Were this to be your case only for a thousand, or a hundred years, how miserable would you be! But Oh, how much more miserable, when you think, that it is an *Everlasting destruction*‖! when your thoughts weary themselves in search of some distant point, where a glimmering of hope may break in upon you, and you go onward, and onward, and onward still, and find nothing, but *Blackness of darkness for ever*¶! when you feel yourselves plunged in a boundless ocean of distress, without a bottom, and without a shore? "Must *The smoke of my torments ascend up for ever and ever***? Must I lie in this infernal *Prison, till I have paid the uttermost farthing*††? Surely then I must bear *Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*‡‡, as long as an immortal soul can sustain it, as an eternal God can inflict it."

It is almost insupportable, to think that this should be the case of any of our fellow-creatures. How much more insupportable must it then be, to feel that it is your own!

Again, your pious parents will lament, "that all their kind endeavours for your salvation were in vain:" But with what aggravated sorrow and despair will you then reflect on those endeavours, and on all the other religious advantages you enjoyed!

"Alas!" will you then be ready to say, "If there could be any thought of comfort in the midst of this dark gloom of

* Rom. xiii. 14.
§ Mat. xiii. 42.
** Rev. xiv. 11.
† Job xxi. 13.
‖ 2 Thess. i. 9.
†† Mat. v. 26.
‡ Ezek. xxii. 14.
¶ Jude, ver. 13.
‡‡ Rom. ii. 9.

desolation and horror, it would be to transfer the blame of my ruin upon another. Oh that I could say, there was some powerful, arbitrary being, by whose irresistible hand I was forcibly borne away, as by a mighty torrent, and swept into this burning gulph! Oh that I could say, that I was wicked and miserable by a fatal necessity! But there is not a wretch, amidst all the rage and blasphemy of such a dwelling as this, who can dare to assert that to have been the case: How much less then can I assert it!

"When I look up," may you justly say, "when I look up to yonder seats of unapproachable glory, from whence I am now *Cast out, as an abominable branch**, Why was not my portion there? Wretch that I am, I was once numbered among the children of the kingdom; I was born in Emmanuel's land; I was educated in a religious family; and Oh, my parents and my ministers! how diligently did they instruct me! how awfully did they admonish me! how tenderly did they expostulate with me! I had indeed *Line upon line, and precept upon precept*†; and therefore I have now stroke upon stroke, and wound upon wound. The blood of a Redeemer was once offered me as a healing balm, and I despised it; and now it is poured out, as a burning corrosive on my bleeding soul. I was once lifted up even to the gates of heaven, and now I am cast down to the very centre of hell: I am now looking with envy, and with rage, on the milder torments of *Tyre and Sidon*, of *Sodom and Gomorrah*‡. There, sinner, thou wilt perhaps curse the compassionate heart, which now is almost sinking under this necessary representation of thy danger, and those unavailing tears which one or another of us may now be shedding, in the distant views of thy ruin.

Yet I must add once more, that as your pious parents will tremble "at the view of meeting you at the tribunal of God, so the thoughts of such an interview must be insupportably dreadful to you."

If Satan now draw you from your allegiance to God, and harden your heart to final impenitency, being *Partakers of his sins*, you will be *partakers* likewise *of his plagues*§, and like him, be *Reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day*‖. And how will your haughty hearts brook it, when you are to be brought out to that judgment? Oh, how often will your anxious, foreboding thoughts anticipate the shame and horror of that dreadful day!

* Isa. xiv. 19. † Isa. cxviii. 10. ‡ Mat. xi. 21—24.
§ Rev. xviii. 4. ‖ 2 Pet. ii. 4.

"I must stand forth," will you then say, "I must stand forth before my inexorable judge; my sin and my folly must be publicly proclaimed before the assembled world, and my parents too must be the witness of it. But oh, how shall I be able to lift up my face before them, blackened with the marks of guilt and despair! If I *Call*, will *there be any to answer me;* or *to which of the saints* shall I then *turn* *? Shall I turn to my parents and intreat them, by all their former tenderness for the children of their own bowels, to plead with the judge in my favour, if, perhaps they may mitigate the rigour of his wrath? Alas, I know him, and myself, and them too well, to expect any such attempt, or to ask any such favour. Will they not rather stand up as *Swift witnesses against me*† and call for an increase of wrath on my guilty head? Will not all their former tenderness be turned into stern and awful severity? Will they not upbraid me with their instructions, their reproofs, their prayers, and their tears; and applaud the triumphs of the divine vengeance, in the condemnation of so wicked, of so incorrigible a creature? With these awful remonstrances I dismiss you, and conclude with a reflection of a more comfortable nature.

3. From this survey of the reflections of a pious parent on the death of a wicked child, we may certainly infer,—That the parents of religious children have abundant reason for thankfulness.

They have reason for thankfulness, both as they are free from such melancholy reflections and apprehensions; and as a foundation is laid of other views, as full of cheerfulness and joy, as these are of terror and distress. My brethren I congratulate the happiness of those of you, who can say through grace, that God has *Established his covenant with you, and with your seed after you, for an everlasting covenant to be a God unto you, and unto them*‡. It is the joy of my heart, to think how much it must be the joy of yours, to see your *Children walking in the truth* §; and to see them *Flourishing in the courts of your God* ‖, as well as growing *Like olive plants round your own tables* ¶: to see, that they have not only *Escaped the* grosser *corruptions, which are in the world through lust* **, but *subscribe with their hand unto the Lord, and surname themselves by the name of Israel, his people* ††. With what sweet tranquillity may you look forward to all the uncertainties of life

* Job. v. 1. † Mal. iii. 5. ‡ Gen. xvii. 7. § 2 John ver. 4.
‖ Psal. xcii. 13. ¶ Psal. cxxviii. 3. ** 2 Pet. i. 4. †† Isa. xliv. 5.

and death, for yourselves and for your children, while you have such a joyful persuasion, that you leave them in the hand of *Your Father, and of their Father, of your God, and of their God* *.

And give me leave, on so natural an occasion, to address myself to you, my dear friends, from whom the great Sovereign of life has been pleased to take away pious and promising children, by what we are apt erroneously to call an immature death. You are ready to say, with a peculiar accent, that you *Are the persons who have seen affliction*†. The images of those lovely creatures rise in your memory on such a hint as this, and crowd into your minds afresh. You saw them growing up, and flourishing under your care; growing up, perhaps, to ripeness of years, and flourishing in some remarkable degrees of knowledge and of grace. And you fondly promised yourselves, from what you saw in them, that they would not only have been the comfort and delight of your declining broken age, but the support and honour of the church, when you were here no more: And now all these pleasing prospects are vanished, all these important hopes are buried with their dear dust.

Nay, perhaps, God hath, in this respect, *Broken you with breach upon breach*‡, has taken away one desirable branch of your family after another, till all the branches are lopped off, and you stand like the naked trunk of trees which were once diffusing a thick and extensive shade. Yes, I am aware, there are some of you, that know the peculiar agony, to all but such as yourselves probably unknown, of following your last child to the grave. I fear, I come too near you, and that some of your wounds are bleeding anew. Would the balm of sympathetic tears administer any relief to them, how easy would it be to pour it out in abundance! But, in a case like yours, there is a much more efficacious and sovereign relief.

I am speaking to christians. You sometimes plead the indications of wisdom and piety, which you discerned in your children as an aggravation of your sorrow for the loss of them; and I acknowledge, in one view, they are indeed so: But in another view, how greatly do they extenuate it!

You saw them, it may be, when they were under a languishing distemper, for some time, as it were, daily dying before your eyes; but did you not likewise see the divine *Rod and staff comforting them* §? It may be, sometimes to such a degree, that you regretted not so much, that they were going

* John xx. 17. † Lam. iii. 1. ‡ Job xvi. 14. § Psal. xxiii. 4.

off the stage, as that you were not accompanying them in the same way, and with the same spirit. You heard their expiring groans, but did you not also hear some songs of praise mingled with them? Perhaps, you heard them strengthening their feeble voices, and summoning up all their little remainder of spirits, to say, as from their very soul, *My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever* *. And does the recollection afford you no pleasure? or does your pleasure terminate even here?

Your dear children are now dead to you; but do you not believe, that *They live to God* †, and live with him? What if they had been still continued on earth, answering all your schemes, and possessing all that you intended or desired for them? How low had those services been, and how worthless those possessions, in comparison with the services which they now render, with the riches and glory which they now inherit!

Methinks it should be, and surely, christians, it sometimes is, matter of rejoicing to you, to reflect, that the desolation of your houses is, in some degree, the prosperity and joy of that celestial society, to which you are more intimately allied, than to any thing here: To think, that your families should have been nurseries for heaven, and that God should have honoured you so far, as already to have taken some of your children to minister around the throne of his glory, and so to be the associates of angels in their highest honour and joy.

And is it not most delightful to think of meeting them again? Had they still survived, the thoughts of leaving them might have sharpened the pangs of dissolving nature, which now the remembrance of them may moderate. You had left them in an insnaring, calamitous world; perhaps, some of you had left them in circumstances of difficulty and distress. But now all those apprehensions are over; and what would otherwise have been the stroke of painful separation, will now be the means of ending your separation, and bringing you, once for all, to the embraces of each other. And oh, with what mutual congratulations will the converse be renewed! With what delightful overflowings of parental complacency on the one side, and of filial gratitude on the other! How thankfully will

* Psal. lxxiii. 26.———* Some, into whose hands these discourses will probably fall, know, that these were not imaginary circumstances; and cannot but remember, they have since attended the death of some of those young persons to whom this sermon was first preached.

† Luke xx. 38.

they for ever acknowledge your pious cares and early instructions, to which perhaps, under God, they owe their first religious impressions, and, in some sense, even their present glory! And in the great day of the Lord, with what unutterable transports of holy joy will you stand forth, and say at once, in the most literal and the most sublime sense, *Here are we, and the children that our God hath graciously given us* *!

Surely, when you think of these things, your joys may abundantly counter-balance your sorrows; and I appeal to your own hearts, even in the midst of all this tender distress, whether such a circumstance as yours, supposing it ever so aggravated, be not much more tolerable, than that, which we have been describing; of a pious parent bewailing the death of a wicked child, or even looking upon him in life and health under the tyranny of satan, and of sin, and in the probable way to everlasting misery.

And thus I have finished my meditations on this pathetic and important subject. Let me conclude with my most affectionate *Prayers to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies*†, for all of you to whom the discourse has been addressed.

May young ones be brought, by the blessed Spirit of God, to *Know in this their day, the things that belong to their* eternal *peace*‡; that they may apply to Christ for life and salvation, and *Join themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant*§. There all our applications to you centre; there may all your attendances on our ministrations issue!

May those, who have been effectually taught this lesson, who are the joys of parents and ministers, and the hopes of the church, as to the rising age, be very deeply sensible of the distinguishing grace of God to them! may they be spared to rise up in the stead of their parents! and may they labour with great success, to spread a spirit of seriousness amongst their companions, and to maintain it continually in their own souls!

May the pious parents of pious children be suitably affected with the goodness of God to them and theirs! And may the parents of others be stirred up, as they value the souls of their children, and their own comfort and repose, to renew those attempts which have hitherto proved unsuccessful, and to exert the most vigorous efforts, for plucking the unhappy creatures, as *Brands out of the burnings*‖!

* Heb. ii. 13. Gen. xxxiii. 5. † 2 Cor. i. 3. ‡ Luke xix. 42.
§ Jer. l. 5. ‖ Amos iv. 11. Zech. iii. 2.

In a word, may divine grace so co-operate with all, that all of you, according to your different relations and characters, may have reason to bless God for those awful thoughts which I have now been laying before you ; that such cutting reflections, as I have so largely described, under the former heads, may never be known by one parent, or one child in this assembly, otherwise than by description, by imagination, by reason, and by faith ! Never may they be known by heart-rending, and overwhelming experience ! On the contrary, may parents and children be mutually growing joys and comforts to each other, in life, and in death, at your appearance before the solemn tribunal of Christ, and throughout all the ages of a glorious eternity ! Amen.

SERMON VII.

TO YOUNG PERSONS.

Youth reminded of Judgment.

Eccles. xi. 9.——*Rejoice, O young Man, in thy Youth, and let thine Heart cheer thee in the Days of thy Youth; and walk in the Ways of thine Heart, and in the Sight of thine Eyes: But know thou, that for all these Things God will bring thee into Judgment.*

MY dear young friends! if it were possible for me, while I am speaking, to lay open my whole heart before you, in such a manner as that you should be witnesses to every secret sentiment of it with regard to you, I should do it with a great deal of pleasure. You would see a tenderer concern for your present and everlasting welfare than words can express, and a proportionable desire of approving myself *Your* faithful *servant for Jesus' sake**. I know not, how far you may have considered what I have largely laid before you, concerning "The Importance of the Rising Generation†;" but I am so thoroughly convinced of this importance, and so impressed with the conviction of it, that there is no part of my public work, to which I arise with a greater solicitude about the success, than I feel when I am thus particularly applying myself to you; and there is no prayers which I offer to God with greater earnestness, than that I may have the *Joy to see* you *walking in the truth*‡, *a seed to serve the Lord*, which *shall be accounted to him for a generation*§.

This is what I wish, and pray, with regard to all of you. It is with inexpressible pleasure that I see so evidently, as to many, that my prayers and my labours are not in vain. Many of you are *My joy* now, and I trust, through divine grace, will be *my crown in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming*‖. But would to God, there were none of whom I had occasion to say, *I stand in doubt of you*¶! Would to

* 2 Cor. iv. 5. † Sermon I. ‡ 3 John, ver. 4.
§ Psal. xxii. 30. ‖ 1 Thess. ii. 19. ¶ Gal. iv. 20.

God I could see that spirit of serious piety universally prevailing amongst you, which, wherever it doth prevail in young ones, is such a token of good to themselves, to their friends, and to the church of Christ!

Where it is otherwise, I look upon you with compassion and sorrow; but blessed be God, not with despair. I am not without hope, that God hath purposes of love and grace to serve on many of you; especially those, who have been the children of so many good instructions, and so many prayers, as I have reason to believe many of you are; and who can tell, but this is the day, and this the ordinance, in which these gracious purposes are to take place?

I know, that the first step to your safety is a sense of your danger. We live in a world so full of snares, the *Righteous scarcely are saved**; and yet I fear, some of you have very little apprehension of this danger, very little concern about *The whole armour of God*†, so necessary to preserve you from it. And therefore, not to give you any vain and groundless alarm, but to produce, if possible, that holy caution and solicitude of soul, which may be the happy means of your security and preservation, I am now setting myself to discourse on some of the most awful words, which are any where in the whole book of God, addressed to persons of your age. I hope you will listen to them, and that God will make them as a kind of solemn trumpet, whereby those that are spiritually dead may be awakened; so awakened, as that the other trumpet to which they refer, and which will surely awaken your sleeping dust, may be heard not with sorrow, but with delight.

It is observable, that Solomon had a great regard to young people in his writings; and it is an evidence of his wisdom that he had so, for youth is the age of discipline. He therefore gives them line upon line, and precept upon precept. Sometimes he soothes, and sometimes he rebukes; sometimes he beseeches them with paternal tenderness, and sometimes persuades them, as *Knowing the terrors of the Lord*‡; and *saves* them as *with fear, plucking them out of the fire*§. And this he doth in the words I have now been reading; *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes. But know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment.*

It will be my business—to explain, and—to inforce the

* 1 Pet. iv. 18. † Eph. vi. 11. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 11. § Jude, ver. 23.

caution, and then—to conclude with some reflections upon it. May the plain, but awful things I am to deliver, be, as *The words of the wise are, like goads*, to pierce and rouse our minds, and *like nails fastened in a sure place by the* skilful *masters of assemblies**, which being given out from the one great Shepherd, are succeeded by his grace, and improved to his glory!

I. I am to explain the words I have been reading.

And, in order to fix the sense of them, I shall only observe, that some understand them, as intimating Solomon's readiness to allow young people in the innocent pleasures and gaieties of life; whilst others interpret the whole as a solemn and a lively warning of the great danger they were in, of running into the most fatal excess. I shall in a few words give you my reasons, both why I mention the former, and why I prefer the latter of these senses.

1. Some understand these words, as an intimation of Solomon's readiness to indulge young people in all the innocent entertainments of life.

They paraphrase the words in a soft and easy manner, as if he had said, "Do not imagine, Oh young man that I give thee lessons of morality and piety in a gloomy humour, or with any rigorous and unkind design. Far from desiring to lay thee under any unnecessary restraint, I rather exhort thee to rejoice in the days of thy youth, those best days, in which the spirits are brisk and lively, and all the powers of nature in their most vigorous state. Let thine heart then cheer thee: Wear an habitual smile upon thy countenance, indulge that gaiety which is so natural in the spring-season of life; so natural, and indeed so decent. Walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: Seek out every innocent object of amusement; gratify thy genius, thy temper, thy relish, in all the particularities of it; provided only that thou dost still remember thy future account, acknowledging God in thy ways, and guarding against every abuse of his goodness, every thing that would on the whole be offensive to him, and detrimental to thyself."

My brethren, I readily own, that there is nothing in this paraphrase of the words which is unbecoming the piety and wisdom of the author, and that he has in effect said the same in several passages of this very book. There is hardly a senti-

* Eccles. xii. 11. Isai. xxii. 23.

ment, which he more frequently repeats than this. There is nothing, says he, in express words again and again, *There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of his labour**. *It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun; for it is his portion*, and a heart *to rejoice in it is the gift of God*†. *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart: Let thy garments be always white, and thine head lack no ointment*‡. And once more, I recommend *Mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat and to drink, and to be merry*§. The sense of which, if we would find a sense worthy of the author, must no doubt be this, " that religion is far from forbidding a cheerful use of the enjoyments of life; and that without such a use they are given to the possessor in vain;" who indeed can otherwise hardly be called the possessor, but rather the steward and purveyor for the next heir, who may perhaps be as profuse, as his predecessor was penurious and insatiable.

And I hope you will not imagine, that in what I have farther to say, I intend any thing inconsistent with these observations and advices. To be devout, and to be melancholy, are two very different things; and the greatest enemies of religion could not call it by a more invidious and unjust name, than a *Walking mournfully before the Lord of hosts*‖. Instead therefore of dissuading you from a life of true pleasure, I would rather direct you to it, and only urge you to despise that which is visionary and mean, to secure that which is solid and noble; in a word, to decline no delights which will not interfere with others much more valuable, none which will not be mingled with regret, or followed by a lasting anguish, a thousand times more than an equivalent for them. And so far as these precautions will admit, I will venture to say, even in this sense, *Rejoice O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth.* Nevertheless I am well persuaded this is not, and cannot be, the original sense of the words; and therefore I add,

2. They are rather to be understood, as an awful and lively caution to young persons, to be upon their guard against those gratifications whereby conscience might be wounded, and God dishonoured.

I suppose, with the general stream of commentators, that

* Eccles. ii. 24. iii. 12, 13, 22. † Eccles. v. 18, 19. ‡ Eccles. ix. 7, 8.
§ Eccles. viii. 15. ‖ Mal. iii. 14.

the words are an ironical way of expressing, in a more pointed and lively manner, the very contrary to what they seem literally to speak; Like that speech of Elijah concerning Baal, when he said, *Cry aloud, for he is a God**; or that of Micaiah to Ahab, *Go up to Ramoth Gilead, and prosper* †; or that of our Lord to his disciples, *sleep on now, and take your rest*‡: To which, I suppose, we may add that saying of God concerning Adam after his fall, *Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil*§. Thus do these words most strongly forbid what they seem to allow, and are as if he had said, "Thou poor thoughtless creature, who in this giddy intoxication of youth, art so madly bent upon sensual pleasure, take thy fill of it, and withhold not thine heart from any joy. Follow all the most impetuous appetites of nature, and wantonly bound over every restraint of reason and piety, trample on the admonition of all thy teachers, shake off the fetters of a strict education, and burst the bonds of religion, like threads of flax when they are touched by the flame. But think not, Oh sinner, that thou shalt always carry it off with that haughty triumph. Know, that as thou hast thy day, God will also have his: A day of strict account, and of ample recompence. *Know, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment*; and if thou canst find out no expedient, to conceal thee from an all-seeing eye, or to defend thee from an omnipotent hand, a deluge of wrath will bear thee away to everlasting destruction: Dearly shalt thou then pay for every present indulgence, and every sweet morsel shall then be turned, and be as the gall of asps within thee."

This, I say, appears to be the evident meaning of these words: And that for this plain reason; that some of the phrases made use of, are such as are never taken in a good sense, and therefore cannot admit the former interpretation. Solomon doth indeed, as you have heard, exhort his readers to *eat and drink, and enjoy the good of their labours*: But where can you find him, or any other sacred writer, exhorting or allowing men to *walk in the way of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes?* I am sure, that phrase generally signifies an indulgence to the irregularities of appetite and passion, in the neglect of reason and of scripture. Thus the Israelites are charged to wear *Fringes on their garments*‖, *that they might remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and might not seek after their own heart, and their own eyes*; that is, as it follows, that they

* 1 Kings xviii. 27. † 1 Kings xxii. 15. ‡ Mat. xxvi. 45.
§ Gen. iii. 22. ‖ Numb. xv. 39.

might not *go a whoring* from God *after* those gay and luxurious *idolatries*, which *regaled the senses*, while they debauched the soul. And thus the wicked Israelite, whom God would separate to evil out of all the tribes, is represented as vainly and arrogantly saying* *I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my own heart;* that is, as it follows, *to add drunkenness to thirst*, or one riot to another. And once more; *To judge after the sight of the eyes*†, is a proverbial expression, to signify partial and corrupt judgment. We have no reason therefore to imagine, that Solomon would vary the signification of a phrase already so expressly fixed in some of the sacred writings; which he was himself obliged not only to read, but to transcribe‡, as he undoubtedly did on his accession to the throne; where he had also read it again and again, that *The imagination of man's heart is only evil from his youth*§; and he had himself elsewhere said, that *foolishness is* so closely *bound up in the heart of a child*, that not only words of admonition, but *the rod of correction* is necessary to drive it away‖. To these general remarks on the usual signification of the phrases occurring here, we may also farther add, that the connection of these words would lead us to understand them as an ironical rather than a serious concession, since they conclude with what seems a very awful menace, *But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment:* As if he should have said, "Assure thyself, thou must answer for all." Which sense is farther illustrated by what follows in the last verse of this, and the first of the next chapter, [which are very unhappily divided from each other, as several other passages are, which have indeed a very close and necessary connection;] *Therefore, remove sorrow from thy heart*, i. e. the regret which would follow these sensual indulgencies, if thou *walk in the way* of it, *and put away evil from thy flesh*, i. e. those carnal pleasures which religion forbids, or those punishments they would certainly draw down upon thee; *for childhood and youth are vanity.* And *remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth*¶, instead of sacrificing them to vanity and folly. You easily see there is a beautiful and lively opposition between the several parts of the period on this interpretation, which on the other must be much injured, if not entirely destroyed.

I would farther observe, that the judgment, to which Solomon here refers, must undoubtedly be that of a future state;

* Deut. xxix. 19. † Isa. xi. 3. ‡ Deut. xvii. 18, 19.
§ Gen. vi. 5. viii. 21. ‖ Prov. xxii. 15. ¶ Eccles. xi. 10. xii. 1.

since he had expressly asserted above, that here *All things come alike to all; and no man knoweth either love or hatred*, i. e. the favour or displeasure of the divine Being, *by all that is before them**: That *there is a wicked man to whom it happeneth according to the event of the righteous; and* on the other hand, many *a righteous man to whom it happeneth according to the event of the wicked*†; i. e. that very bad men often prolong their lives through a long series of prosperity, while good men are cut off by an untimely stroke, or linger out their days in a painful succession of sorrows. This led him to conclude, *Surely God will judge the righteous and the wicked*‡; which in many of these cases could only be done in some invisible state, to which both should be reserved. And of this judgment he solemnly warns the young sinner, as a most powerful antidote against the baits of sensuality; as an awful thought, which might fix the most roving eye, and be a means of reducing the most ungoverned heart to the discipline of wisdom and piety.

As I conclude that this sense of the words is now sufficiently illustrated and established, I proceed,

II. To inforce the admonition by such considerations, as are expressly suggested in the text, or may naturally arise from it.

I importunately beg your serious attention; *I say not these things*, either to grieve, or *to shame you, but as my beloved* brethren and *children I warn you*§. And here let me prevail upon you to consider,—the depravation and corruption of your own heart,—the many delusive charms which are continually offering themselves to your eyes;—consider, that the blessed God is now the spectator of your conduct,—that he will certainly bring you to an account for it,—an account which will be inexpressibly strict and awful.—These are the arguments, which I shall more largely inforce; and if they make no deep impression on your mind, there is the utmost reason to fear, that you will go on hardened in your evil ways, till you actually come to that tribunal, which you now forget or despise.

1. Think of the depravation and corruption of your own hearts, to deter you from walking in the ways of them.

The heart of man is described by that God, who alone perfectly knows it, as *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*‖. *The imagination of it is*, by him, said to be *only evil*,

* Eccles. ix. 1, 2. † Eccles. viii. 14. vii. 15. ‡ Eccles. iii. 17.
§ 1 Cor. iv. 14. ‖ Jer. xvii. 9.

and that *continually**. It is a very sad truth, though perhaps you have never seriously considered it, that a degenerate and corrupted nature is conveyed down from one generation of men to another, so as still to leave room—for that expostulation of Job, *What is man that he should be pure, how can he be clean that is born of a woman*†*!*—for that confession of David, *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*‡*!*—for that declaration of the apostle, whether in his own name, or that of another, *In me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing*§. If you know not *The plague of your own heart*‖, it is a plain argument that you know little of God, or of yourselves; and you had need be seriously reminded of it, lest, with Solomon's fool, you should *trust it*¶, and *the blind lead the blind, till you fall into the pit* of destruction**.

Do you not know the degeneracy and corruption of your own hearts? I beseech you to review what has passed there: Think of the advantages which you have enjoyed for knowing and serving God; of all the mercies you have received, of all the instructions you have heard, of all the convictions you have sometimes felt, and of all the good resolutions you have probably formed in consequence of them: And then think, how little all this hath produced, how you have *forgotten God, days* and times *without number*††, and *started back* from him *like a deceitful bow*‡‡; how you have been delivered over, in a foolish circle, from one vanity to another, wearied with the pursuit of trifles, and yet rising, after a little respite, to pursue them again. Think, my friends, how you have overborne the dictates of your own consciences, and grieved the holy spirit of God, when he hath been pleading with you in a most importunate manner, and saying unto you, *Oh do not this abominable thing that I hate*§§. Yet you have done it, and sacrificed the repose of your own minds, and the hopes of glory, to mean, vile considerations, which you would be ashamed to hear mentioned before an assembly: And this not in one instance, but again and again. You have formed good purposes, and broken them; and formed them again, and broken them again; and run such a round of folly and sin, that I am persuaded many of you could not have suspected yourselves of such a conduct some time ago, nor have believed, if one had told you, that you should act such a part. And must these treacherous hearts still be trusted, and will you still go on to walk in the ways of them? when they have already

* Gen. vi. 5. † Job xv. 14. xxv. 4. ‡ Psal. li. 5. § Rom. vii. 18.
‖ 1 Kings viii. 38. ¶ Prov. xxviii. 26. ** Mat. xv. 14. †† Jer. ii. 32.
‡‡ Psal. lxxviii. 57. §§ Jer. xliv. 4.

led you into so much sin, when they have already plunged you into so much distress?

2. Think how many delusive charms are daily offering themselves to your eyes, that you may not heedlessly walk in the sight of them.

Remember, Sirs, I beseech you, that you are in a very dangerous situation, and walk among snares. The most mortal poisons are often mingled with the sweetest dainties, and the most dangerous enemies of our souls accost us in the fairest forms. The fruit which undid our common mother, and brought death and a curse upon us all, was a fruit which appeared to be *Good for food*, and which she saw to be *pleasant to the eyes**.

It is an awakening saying of one of the most lively and pathetic, as well as of the most pious writers which our age has produced†, "That the condition of man in his natural state seems to be like that of a person sick of a variety of diseases, knowing neither his distemper nor cure, but unhappily inclosed in a place where he could hear, or see, or taste, or feel nothing, but what tended to inflame his disorder."

Not that the world in its original constitution, and considered as the work of God, is by any means to be blamed. The whole system of it is such, as would lead a regular mind to wise and pious reflections; and its most pleasurable scenes would be the natural occasion of exciting correspondent gratitude and devotion to the great author of *Every good and perfect gift*‡. But our souls being corrupted, those things become dangerous to us, which might otherwise have been innocent, and even beneficial; as some of the most wholesome and nourishing foods are fatal to a person inflamed with a raging fever.

I am persuaded, that nothing is so likely to make us truly wise, as observations on facts. Let me therefore beseech you, my young friends, seriously to consider how many, within the compass of your own knowledge, have been ruined by the blandishments of the senses; and, perhaps, some of them persons, in other respects, of no contemptible characters. We may indeed say of the world, that specious harlot, *She hath cast down many wounded, and many strong men have been slain by her*§. Do not, therefore, *walk in the sight of your eyes*, lest you also be *like the bird, that*, struck with some gay promising appearance, *hasteneth* eagerly *to the snare, and knoweth not that it is*

* Gen. iii. 6. † Law on Christian Perfection, p. 11. ‡ James i. 17. § Prov. vii. 26.

for his life:* But endeavour to open the eye of the mind, and by faith to behold the great realities of the invisible world, that you may govern your lives with a regard to them, and so secure, not the deceitful forms, but the substance of true happiness.

3. Let me seriously remind you, that the blessed God is the spectator of all your conduct.

This is strongly implied, though it be not expressed in the text: *For all these things God will bring thee into judgment;* and you cannot surely imagine, that he is like earthly judges, who must have recourse to witnesses, to inform them of what they would otherwise be ignorant. *He is not*, he cannot be, *far from any one of us, seeing in him we live, and move, and have our being†:* Nor can we be concealed from his eye, should we fly on *the wings of the morning*, and with the swiftness of light, *to the uttermost ends of the earth*; for *his hand must lead us* thither, and *his right hand support us there‡*. Remember this, my friends, he sees you when you overlook him, sees himself neglected by you, and his laws violated, and his grace despised: And all for what? You have reason to blush and be confounded, when you think of that: For every vanity that offers itself to pour pursuit, for trifles lighter than air, for which you would not violate the common rules of decency to a fellow creature: As if it were to be taken for granted, that his favour is a thing of no consequence, or that nothing can forfeit it. Oh, Sirs, he hears me while I am speaking to you; and sees perhaps, that some of you hardly give me an attentive hearing. He observes, how many admonitions are despised by you, how many convictions are overborne, how many vows are broken, how many vain words are spoken to him, in those formalities which you call your devotions; and, perhaps, with regard to some of you, I may add, how many bold words are spoken against him, when those *mouths* are *set against the heavens, whose tongues have walked through the earth§:* All those slights of religion, which, for want of understanding either, you may be ready to call wit; all that licentious contempt which you throw on his sacred word and ordinances, and fancy it is freedom of thought. You may go on, and presume upon it, that *Your lips are your own‖;* but I must tell you, that *The Lord hearkens and hears, and a book of remembrance is written¶* for you likewise;—a book which will another day be thrown open, and read to you with a voice of vengeance and terror; which leads me to urge you,

* Prov. vii. 23. † Acts xvii. 27, 28. ‡ Psal. cxxxix. 9, 10.
§ Psal. lxxiii. 9. ‖ Psal. xii. 4. ¶ Mal. iii. 16.

4. To think how certain the judgment of God is, and your own personal appearance before him.

You know there is not any doctrine of the gospel more plain and evident than this, that *Every one of us must give an account of himself to God*;* and indeed it was a doctrine of the jewish revelation, and even of the wiser heathens: But I would desire you particularly to observe, how strongly it is expressed in the words of the text, *Know thou, that God will bring thee into judgment! Thee*, Oh young man, *thee*, Oh child whoever thou art, that hearest me this day, to *thee* is the word of this admonition sent, *God will bring thee into judgment.* His trumpet will sound, his tribunal will be set; thou wilt be summoned, and thou must obey. In vain will be every attempt to conceal thyself, or to excuse or dispute an immediate attendance. He will bring thee: *His hand* will be *strong upon thee*†, infinitely too strong for thy feeble resistance: And therefore the assembly of the whole world before him is beautifully described, by driving together a *Flock of sheep, or of goats*‡. Bear witness, Oh sinner, and let thy conscience record it, I warn thee of this solemn, this dreadful day. I tell thee, that as surely as thou art now in the house of God, thou shalt then be standing before his bar: And how will you stand? Look you to that. We are to give the warning, and, *Knowing the terrors of the Lord*, are to *persuade men*§. *Hear* now therefore this admonition for yourselves, *and know it for your good*‖. *Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver*¶. And to increase the weight and efficacy of the thought, reflect, once more,

5. How strict and awful this judgment will be. For all these things God will bring thee into judgment; which naturally implies, that it will be particular and final.

Every particular will be reviewed: All these things; or, as it is yet more strongly expressed elsewhere, *Every work, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil***. He hath *Sworn by himself, that he will not forget any of thy works*††. Poor thoughtless creatures! you sometimes conceal your irregularities from parents and masters, or others to whom you are accountable; you disguise them in so artful a manner,

* Rom. xiv. 12. † Ezek. iii. 14. ‡ Mat. xxv. 32. § 2 Cor. v. 11.
‖ Job v. 27. ¶ Psal. l. 22. ** Eccles. xii. 14. †† Amos viii. 7.

or form such excuses for them as may impose upon men; and you value yourselves on the dexterity with which you do it: But *Be not deceived, God* cannot thus be *mocked**: For all these things, and a thousand times more than you can remember; actions and words, and thoughts of vanity, which passed with you unobserved in the crowd, or, if at all observed, were forgotten in a moment; for all these, will he *Reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes*†, i. e. He will marshall them in dreadful array, as a host of enemies armed for thy destruction. Have you never seen a criminal at the bar, how he is confounded, when the force of evidence bears him down, and the sagacity of a judge detects the idle, foolish pleas, with which he flattered himself before his trial, and imagined he should easily come off with impunity? Then did you see an emblem of yourselves, and your own state; thus will you, if you go on in your sins, be entangled and silenced, and shamed and condemned: All your crimes will be produced, in all their circumstances of aggravation: Nor will God forget this present admonition and expostulation, though you may forget it, or though you should remember it only in scorn, and wonder what occasion there is for all this earnestness and importunity. You may, if you please, make a jest of divine judgment; but you will find it dreadfully serious. Nothing so easy, as to despise it; but, Oh sinner, nothing so hard, as to endure it: For I add,

It will be a final doom, and your eternal state will be fixed by it. It is no light crime of which you will then be convicted, no less than wilful, obstinate, incorrigible rebellion against the Majesty of heaven, against the God of your lives, and the Father of all your mercies: And it will be no light punishment to which you will be consigned, for following *the way of your heart and the sight of your eyes*, in opposition to all the authority of his law, and all the methods of his recovering grace.

Read over the sentence, as recorded from the lips of him by whom it is to be pronounced. There is but one for those on the left hand, and hearken to it: *Depart from me, ye cursed:*— Sinner, thou must be separated from God. But that perhaps you can bear: It is but calling him by some bold name; it is but dressing him up in your imagination under some false odious character, and you may perhaps think it is best to be at a distance from him. Wretched creature! But thou must depart, as accursed, *Into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil*

* Gal. vi. 7. † Psal. l. 21.

and his angels *. And canst thou reconcile thy mind to that? To dwell for ever in darkness and horror, in such a scene, and with such associates! To have nothing to entertain the eye, nothing to cheer the heart, nothing to divert painful reflection, nothing to allay the most cutting remorse! To see every pleasurable object, for which you forgot God, and sold yourselves to destruction, removed to an eternal distance; to feel all the irregular passion of your own hearts let loose at once, like so many hungry vultures to prey insatiably upon them; and hope, the last of supports under the last of evils, shut out for ever!—Oh Sirs, this is the result of the judgment of God. *Lo, this is the portion of the wicked, and* this *the heritage appointed to him by God* †. It is a grief to a tender heart to think of it, to hear the very report. Oh what will it be to you to meet it and feel it, in all its force and all its terror! *Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong, in the day, that God shall deal with you* ‡.

Alas, my heart is pained for you, and my bowels yearn over you! Methinks I see all the haughtiness of your spirits broken, see you pale and trembling on the very brink of that pit, from whence there is no redemption, and into which the flaming sword of divine justice is driving you. And can nothing be done to save you? Alas, what should be done? Can any rescue you from the hand of Omnipotence? Can any intercede for you with that then inexorable Judge? It cannot be. But he is not yet inexorable. He has not yet laid aside the character of a Saviour, of a compassionate Friend to perishing creatures. And I present these things to persuade you, if possible, *In this your day, to know the things that belong to your peace, before they be* for ever *hid from your eyes* §. May divine grace effectually do it; and teach you so to *Judge yourselves, that you may not then be condemned of the Lord* ‖! And now,

III. It only remains, that I conclude the discourse with some plain inferences from it. And here,

1. The young sinner has surely a great deal of reason to be thankful, that he hath not already been brought into judgment.

You have indeed the greatest cause to say, *It is of the Lord's mercy, that* you *are not consumed* ¶. Your *Breath is*

* Mat. xxv. 41. † Job xx. 29. ‡ Ezek. xxii. 14.
§ Luke xix. 42. ‖ 1 Cor. xi. 31, 32. ¶ Lam. iii. 22.

in your nostrils;* and perhaps you can recollect times and circumstances, in which it seemed just ready to take its flight, when you appeared to be in the extremest danger, so that there was *But a step between you and death†*. And what if that little interval had been passed! Where had you then been! How low had you then fallen! Why, it is most certain, as to some of you, that had you been thus cut off, the torrent had swept you away into eternal ruin. Even now, while we are worshipping God in his house, rejoicing in mercy and in hope, your miserable spirits had been in the regions of the damned, feeling more than mortal language can express, and fearing yet more, much more than you felt; being, like the apostate angels, *Reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day‡*. Adore the divine patience and forbearance, that your case is so different; for most happily different it is. I have the pleasure to testify to you this day, in the midst of all these terrible things which faithfulness to your souls extorts from me, that *The Lord waiteth, that he may be gracious, and does*, as it were, *raise himself up that he may have mercy upon you§:* He rises from his throne to stretch out the golden sceptre to you, to open his compassionate arms to embrace you, if you approach him as humble penitents. Jesus the Judge will become your friend; he will receive you, he will shelter you and bless you; if with believing hearts you seek his mercy, after having so long dared his vengeance. This day do I testify, that he is readyto bestow upon you far more valuable pleasures than those which he calls you to resign, and to give you much greater satisfaction in contradicting the corruptions of your heart, and controling the impulse of your senses, than you ever have found, or could possibly find, in gratifying them. May you be persuaded to the wise and happy exchange! Then will the patience of God be salvation to you, when his goodness leads you to repentance.

2. The young christian hath apparent reason to be thankful for that grace, which hath sanctified his heart, and turned away his eyes from beholding vanity.

My brethren in the Lord: permit me to remind you that *You were sometimes foolish and disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures‖:* But there is now room for us to congratulate you, and say, *Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your*

* Isa. ii. 22. † 1 Sam. xx. 3. ‡ Jude, ver. 6.
§ Isa. xxx. 18. ‖ Tit. iii. 3.

*ears, for they hear**. You now know your true interest; the fear of the Lord is implanted in your heart, and your eyes are directed heaven-wards. You are experimentally acquainted with the pleasure which religion brings, and see that you have exchanged your tinsel for gold; your shadows for the most valuable substance; the momentary blaze and *crackling of thorns*†, for the steady light, and influence, and glory of the sun, which is *Shining more and more till the perfect day*‡.

Let me invite you to the most cheerful acknowledgments of the riches of divine grace to you. Bless God for the new nature he hath given you, for that *heart of flesh*§ into which the rock is transformed by a new creating power; for those new hopes which he hath opened upon you. Bless him, that you are now sheltered from the storms of divine wrath, and that, instead of looking forward to the judgment day, with the horrors of a malefactor, who is then to be condemned and executed, you are rather lifting up your heads to meet the prospect with triumph, as knowing that your complete salvation will then be manifested, and your redemption be perfected‖.

3. We may farther infer, from what we have now been hearing, that the gospel of the blessed Jesus gives us very great advantages for reclaiming young persons from the snares of sensuality and ruin.

The text abundantly intimates the importance of those considerations, which are taken from the final judgment. Now it is certain, the gospel discovers this in the strongest light. Therein is *The wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*¶, and some more awful views of judgment are given, than even the language of the prophets, emphatical as it is, can furnish out. In the gospel, we are not only told in general, that *God will judge the world in righteousness*, but particularly assured, that he will do it, *by that man whom he hath appointed***, even *The Lord Jesus Christ*, who for that purpose *shall descend from heaven in his own glory, and the glory of the Father, and all the holy angels with him* ††; that *The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised*‡‡; that *small and great shall stand before God* §§; while in the mean time the world is in flames around them, *The sun* being *darkened, and the moon not giving her light*‖‖, *the stars falling*¶¶, *The hea-*

* Mat. xiii. 16.
§ Ezek. xxxvi. 26.
** Acts xvii. 31.
§§ Rev. xx. 12,
† Eccles. vii. 6.
‖ Luke xxi. 28.
†† Mat. xvi. 27. xxv. 31.
‖‖ Mark xiii. 24.
‡ Prov. iv. 18.
¶ Rom. i. 18.
‡‡ 1 Cor. xv. 52.
¶¶ Mat. xxiv. 29.

vens passing away with a great noise, the elements melting with fervent heat, the earth with all things in it being *burnt up**, *and departing out of its place*†. And can any thing be more awakening and awful than all this pomp of horror, this conflagration and confusion of nature? Yes, Sirs, there is one thing yet more awakening; and it is that which the gospel expressly pronounces, that, in consequence of all, *The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal*‡. Eternity, eternity, my brethren, is the declaration of the gospel. Nature might lead us to suspect it, the law might give some intimation of it, but the gospel alone asserts it; and not only asserts it, but describes it too. It lends to our faith that perspective by which we descry the paradise of God, and it lays *hell open before* us, so that *destruction hath no covering*§. The christian preacher may then say it, with an energy beyond what Solomon could conceive, merely on the principles of the Jewish revelation, *Rejoice, Oh young man, in thy youth*, &c. *but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

Nor must I by any means omit that grand advantage which the gospel gives us in these addresses, the discovery of the blessed Jesus under the character of a Saviour. It displays him as the Chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely; as inviting, as waiting, as pleading, as weeping over sinners, yea, as bleeding and dying for them; as describing the terrors of judgment, that he may awaken them to flee from it, and may gather them, *As a hen gathers her chickens under her* compassionate protecting *wings*‖. But is this a simile that we may use, when speaking of him who is to appear under the character of "the worthy judge eternal?" Yes, my friends, low as it may seem, it is a simile that he himself uses, and perhaps uses it in part because it is so low, that the language itself may be a specimen of that condescension which it is intended to express.

Such is that wonderful contrast of what is most awful, and most engaging, in the gospel; and this gospel, Sirs, do you daily hear. *To you is the word of this salvation sent*¶; to you is *the whole counsel* of God declared. May you never be left to *Reject it against yourselves***, may divine grace render it *A Saviour of life unto life*††! Once more;

* 2 Pet. iii. 10. † Rev. xx. 11. ‡ Mat. xxv. 46. § Job xxvi. 6.
‖ Mat. xxiii. 37. ¶ Acts xiii. 26. ** Luke vii. 30. †† 2 Cor. ii. 16.

4. We may farther infer, that the serious thoughts of death must be very useful to young persons, since judgment is so nearly connected with it.

It *is appointed unto all men once to die, and after death the judgment* *; and though the final solemnity of that judgment may be delayed to distant ages, the state of the soul is in a moment unalterably fixed; and, in this sense, *As the tree falls, so it must lie*†, for *There is no device, nor working in the grave*‡.

Now as this is generally acknowledged, we may naturally conclude that those, who remember death, will not forget judgment. Let me therefore, my young friends, call down your thoughts to the grave; and methinks, among so many monuments of mortality, it should not be difficult to do it.

Recollect, I beseech you, what of that kind you have seen the year past. How many of you have attended the funerals of youth like yourselves, of children much younger than yourselves! They have *given up the ghost, and where are they*§? What a change hath death made! Where are they? Why, perhaps, what remains of them, within the walls of this place, under the feet of some of you. Could your eye penetrate a few feet of earth, you would see them; but oh, what spectacles of horror would you discover! yet perhaps a year ago they were in the number of the most amiable objects of your sight. And such is your bloom, such is your vigour: And will you presume upon it, presume so far as to continue exposed to all the terrors of divine judgment, in a vain dependance that some years hence you shall consider and escape it?

Oh *that you were wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your latter end*‖! Oh that you would be willing to converse with the dying, and with the dead! You will, no doubt, soon have renewed opportunities of doing it. Some will probably be called away for lessons to the rest; and before the year rolls round, you may perhaps see some pious youth going with joy and triumph to glory, or some careless or incorrigible creature dying in terror, or, which is yet more dreadful, in a stupid insensibility of soul. Reflect, my brethren, on what of this kind you have seen; attend to what you may farther see; and remember that the house of mourning may prove a school of the most useful discipline, if *the living will lay it to heart*¶.

* Heb. ix. 27. † Eccles. xi. 3. ‡ Eccles. ix. 10.
§ Job. xiv. 10. ‖ Deut. xxxii. 29. ¶ Eccles. vii. 3.

But why do I mention the house of mourning? You are perhaps going to that of feasting *. The leisure of the season invites to it; and custom hath established it into a law, to close the old year and begin the new with some peculiar vanities, in some more than ordinary forgetfulness of all the important purposes for which time and the opportunities of it are given. Such is our wisdom, such is our gratitude, such is our consistence with the name we bear, and the profession we make!

You are perhaps some of you impressed with what you have heard; but I am much afraid, there are those that within twelve days, or even twelve hours will have lost the impression, and be as unconcerned about this great judgment, as if God's own hand had sent them a discharge from appearing at it. It is a discouraging case, and it makes us your ministers almost dread this season, cheerful as it is thought, as that in which former convictions will be worn off, and the heart of unthinking youth will be steeled against those that might otherwise be made; as the season, in which we do, as it were, see the infernal lion bearing away the lambs of our flock, even before our faces.

But we will at least cry out for their deliverance, we will *lift up our voice like a trumpet* †; and may hope, that some of you will *take the warning*, and *hide the word of God in your heart* ‡. Sinners will no doubt be enticing you to walk as they do *In the way of the heart*, and *according to the sight of the eyes;* but *consent not* § to the solicitation, if you would not be destroyed with them, in that day, when they shall appear, as they have now been represented, unable *To stand in the judgment* ‖, and shall perish from this unhappy way which they have taken; and that in a moment, when the wrath of him, whom they now despise shall but *begin* to be *kindled against them* ¶: For it shall be kindled with such terrors, that *they shall say to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand* **? *The Lord grant, that* you *may all find mercy of the Lord in that day* ††! Amen.

* N. B. This sermon was preached at Northampton, December 25, 1735.

† Isa. lviii. 1. ‡ Psal. cxix. 11. § Prov. i. 10. ‖ Psal. i. 5.
¶ Psal. ii. 12. ** Rev. vi. 16, 17. †† 1 Tim. i. 18.

TEN SERMONS

ON THE

POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST,

AND ON THE

EVIDENCES OF HIS GLORIOUS GOSPEL;

PREACHED

AT NORTHAMPTON.

Μη φωναις μονον, και ρημασιν ψοφοις Χριστον γεραιρομεν, αλλα και πασῃ διαθεσει ψυχης· ως και αυτης προλιμαν της εαυτων ζωης την εις αυτον μαρτυριαν.

Euseb. Histor. Eccles. Lib. I. cap. 3.

TO THE

YOUNG PERSONS

OF THE AUDITORY AND SOCIETY

UNDER MY STATED MINISTERIAL CARE,

THIS SECOND EDITION

OF THESE TEN SERMONS,

AT FIRST PREACHED AND PUBLISHED

WITH A PECULIAR VIEW TO THEIR EDIFICATION,

IS NOW

WITH THE MOST CORDIAL PRAYERS

FOR THEIR TEMPORAL AND ETERNAL HAPPINESS

INSCRIBED BY

THEIR MOST AFFECTIONATE FRIEND,

AND FAITHFUL SERVANT

IN THE BONDS OF OUR COMMON LORD,

P. DODDRIDGE.

PREFACE.

THE ten following Sermons were at first preached (in the year 1735,) and published at the desire of William Coward, Esq. with some peculiar regard to the young persons under my care. God hath been pleased to give them such acceptance in the world, that I cannot but hope, they have been made useful; and therefore I shall not make an apology for complying with the request of a great number of friends, some of them at great distances from each other, in publishing this second edition; which has been ready for the press a considerable time, though a series of accidents prevented its being sooner dispatched.

I have in one place and another made several additions, [which are distinguished by crotchets,] especially in the three last sermons, which I have studied to make as plain, and as comprehensive as possible; and knowing the vast importance of the subject, have spared no pains to finish them.

I purpose, before I publish the third volume of my Family Expositor, to perform the promise I made in the first, by adding to these three sermons on the Evidence of Christianity, a few more on the Inspiration of the New Testament, and on the usefulness particularly of its historical contents. But providence has for the present unexpectedly called me out to some other labours, which I hope may be an equivalent to the public for the delay of these.

My Sermons on Regeneration are now in the press; and the importunity of one of the greatest and best of friends to whom nothing is to be denied*, has engaged me to attempt a farther prosecution of that important subject, under the title of The Rise and Progress of the Divine Life in the Soul. I mention this undertaking, chiefly with a view of recommending myself to the prayers of my many christian friends, while I am pursuing it; and so much the rather, as according to the plan, which with my friend's assistance I have drawn of it, I perceive it will be a work of as great variety and difficulty, as any of a practical nature in which I have ever been engaged.

If any ask, why I publish so many things on these practical subjects, so often handled by a variety of writers; I answer in a few words, with all simplicity, as before him to whom I am shortly to render an account of all my actions and views, "Because I know the gospel to be true, and through divine grace I feel in my heart, an ardent concern for the salvation of men's souls." This renders such meditations my delight, and makes me desirous of *warning every man, and teaching every man, that I may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.* And in this view, as other cares appear trifling, so the limits of one congregation or country, and of the little time that I must expect, to spend in life, seem too narrow. Oh that it were possible to speak to *the ends of the earth*, and to the end of time, those important truths which are employing my pen! I know, such plain things will be neglected and despised by many; but I am as sure, there are many others, who thirst for them and relish them. And as I endeavour to write on the common general principles of christianity, and not in the narrow spirit of any particular party, I bless God I have the pleasure to see my writings, imperfect as they are, favoured by many excellent persons of different denominations; and I hope therefore, they may be a means of spreading a serious and candid spirit, which I am sure it is my most earnest labour and prayer that they may.

To intend well, is a foundation of the most solid happiness in life; and to be rightly understood in those intentions, is one of its most sensible delights. The malignity of some tempers will put a sinister interpretation on the most upright and the most benevolent undertakings; but I am persuaded, that where God is pleased

* The Reverend Dr. Watts.

to give an unfeigned zeal for the honour of his gospel, and an overflowing love to the souls of men, he will smile on the attempts which proceed from such a principle, and will teach his servants a language, which good men will generally understand, and the force of which they will feel.

Besides this, as almost every writer has a number of select friends, who read his works, and perhaps love them, because they are his; so I must always acknowledge the divine goodness to me, in giving me a share in the very indulgent regards of many most valuable persons, in distant parts of our land, whose kind acceptance of my poor attempts of service I have found far beyond my expectation, and whose friendship I consider as my greatest earthly treasure. The number has greatly increased since the first edition of these sermons was published; and as this second, and (through the continued care of my good brother Mr. Godwin), much more correct edition, comes out at their earnest request, I doubt not but they will, as in other instances, do their part towards giving it such a spread as may, by the divine blessing, answer the end of rendering it as extensively useful as possible.

Growing experience convinces me, that I have no reason to fear, lest candid and judicious readers should be offended with me, for having given way to some warmth of devout affection, in the greatest part of these discourses, and in others, which I have mentioned above: The subjects are of a nature, not only to excuse, but to require it. And while I have any reverence for scripture, or any knowledge of human nature, I shall never affect to speak of the glories of Christ, and the eternal interest of men, as coldly as if I were reading a lecture of mathematics, or relating an experiment of natural philosophy. I hope I shall always remember, how unworthy the character of a man and a christian it is, to endeavour to transport men's passions, while the understanding is left uninformed, or the judgment unconvinced: But so far as is consistent with a proper regard to these leading powers of our nature, I heartily pray, that I, and all other gospel ministers, may so feel the energy of divine truths on our own souls, as to preach and write concerning them with an holy fervency and ardour; nor can I imagine, it would bode well to the interest of religion in general, to endeavour to lay all those passions asleep, which surely were implanted in our hearts by God, to subserve the religious, as well as civil life, and which after all will probably be employed to some very excellent, or very pernicious purposes.

I would hope, that these sermons, and those on regeneration, will be of some service to religious families, especially on the evenings of the Lord's-day. We are happy in a great number of excellent discourses suitable to such an occasion, and perhaps in none more suitable, than in the two volumes of sermons at Berry-street; of which I can with great cheerfulness repeat what I said, when making my acknowledgments to the founder, immediately after their publication; "that I cannot recollect where I have seen a set of important thoughts on such various and weighty subjects more judiciously selected, more accurately digested, more closely compacted, more naturally expressed, or in so few words more powerfully inforced, than I have generally found in those sermons: On account of which, I doubt not but *the thanksgivings of many are* often *abounding to the glory of God.*"

I esteem it my great felicity, to be engaged with those worthy authors in the same great design, of assisting to form men's minds to a scriptural religion and a christian temper; and though many provinces may appear much more splendid in the eyes of the learned and the polite world, I trust ours will be at least as favourably remembered in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming; and I would have no standard of honour, wisdom and happiness, which will not stand the test of that important day.

Northampton, June 9, 1741.

SERMON I.

POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST.

The Ability of Christ to save to the uttermost.

Heb. vii. 25.—*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make Intercession for them.*

A VARIETY of trifles in life are daily breaking in upon us, and hurrying us away into a forgetfulness of God, and ourselves. But how much soever we may be *Careful and cumbered*, agitated and distracted, *about many things*, *one thing is needful**, viz. the approach of the soul to God, that it may see and enjoy his salvation.—The most important question is that of the awakened and trembling jailor, *What shall I do to be saved?* And the only pertinent answer to that question, is that which the apostle gave, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*†.

And have these later days, these ages, as we are ready fondly to imagine them, of greater refinement and reason, discovered any new method of salvation? God forbid, there should ever be any pretence to it! When we see a person, like our Lord, appearing in an opposite cause, with an equal pomp of miracles, with equal demonstration and power of the spirit, we may perhaps let go that *Anchor of our souls*, which we now esteem as *sure and stedfast*‡; but till then, we will, by divine grace, strenuously retain that gospel, which is recorded by those, who first *Preached it, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven*§: And *If an angel* was to appear, in robes of the purest light, and with all the charms of a celestial eloquence, to establish any other foundation, far from yielding to the evidence of such a single wonder, in opposition to so many greater, we would hold that angel *accursed*‖; as we might certainly conclude, that he wore a deceitful form, and was a messenger from the father of lies.

If the gospel be indeed of divine original, and we are not following *Cunningly devised fables*¶, it is most certain that those doctrines, which are peculiar to it, are not only true but infinitely important. And shall we, who are *Stewards of the mysteries of God***, decline insisting upon them, because they

* Luke x. 41, 42. † Acts xvi. 30, 31. ‡ Heb. vi. 19. § 1 Pet. i. 12.
‖ Gal. i. 8. ¶ 2 Pet. i. 16. ** 1 Cor. iv. 1.

are such common topics, and because we must in effect, be obliged to say the same things again and again? As well might we despise bread, because it is an old-fashioned diet, on which our ancestors have fed for a long succession of ages, and on which the lowest of our species are subsisted. As reasonably, and much more safely, might the physician decline the use of all the most celebrated medicines, recommended by the experience of many hundred years, and pride himself in trying only such, as had hitherto been entirely unknown: Nay he might much better do it; for it is possible, that there may yet lie hid, amongst the secrets of nature, some plant or drug of unknown virtues, some richer cordial, and more sovereign antidote, than has ever yet been discovered: But we are as sure, as we can be of any thing in the revelation we profess to believe, that *There is salvation in no other, neither is there any other name under heaven given among men,* but that of Jesus*, whereby they can obtain righteousness and life.

I hope therefore, it will not, as, I am sure, it should not, be disagreeable to you to hear, that, after the many sacred hours we have spent together in meditations on such subjects as these, I am again to resume the theme, and to discourse to you from it for some succeeding sabbaths. I do it at the desire of a friend†, who has recommended the subject to me with a peculiar regard to the rising generation, for whose use these discourses are to be made yet more public. And I would hope, they will not be the less agreeable to my younger friends or any of my other hearers, because they are equally the concern of all; and such a concern, as to be the very life of our souls, and, as I have largely shewn elsewhere‡, the only foundation of our eternal hopes.

The holy apostle Paul had, as he elsewhere very emphatically expresses it, a continual, most tender and zealous affection for his *Brethren* of the jewish nation, *his kinsmen according to the flesh*§; and this epistle is a remarkable monument of it. It was indeed directed to the believing Hebrews, and its most evident design is, to animate them to adhere resolutely to the christian faith, whatever dangers or difficulties might attend that resolution. But the mind of this excellent man was very capacious and continually filled with a variety of schemes for the

* Acts iv. 12.

† These sermons were first preached and published at the desire of William Coward, Esq.

‡ See my Sermons to Young People, Ser. II.

§ Rom. ix. 3.

advancement of the gospel, the glory of his Lord, and the salvation of souls: And as he could not but know, that it was highly probable, that this, rather than any of his other epistles, would fall into the hands of many, as yet, unconverted Jews, he not only conceals his name, against which he knew they were strongly prejudiced; but in a very wise and happy manner, makes use of such sentiments, and such language here, as might be very proper to awaken and convince the unconverted, as well as to assist the faith and the joy of them who had *Believed in Christ, that they might be justified by him, and not by the works of the law**. And if any have not made this remark, I apprehend they have lost much of the strength and beauty of this excellent epistle.

In pursuit of these great and very harmonious designs, the sacred writer insists largely on the dignity of the person, and offices of our great Redeemer. He represents him, as far superior to the most exalted angels†, and therefore much more to the most excellent of the children of men; superior to *Moses*, that most honourable *servant* of the Lord, *who was faithful in all his house*‡; superior to Abraham, *The friend of God, and father of the faithful*§; superior to Aaron, the priest of the Lord, and all the holy family descended from his loins‖. And it is on this branch of the argument that he is now insisting. He labours at large, by a chain of reasoning, which I have not time to trace, to shew that our Lord was made after the order of Melchizedec, in many glorious and important circumstances, in which the priesthood of Melchizedec was superior to that of Aaron, and his sons: And amongst other instances, this is one of the most considerable, that whereas in the family of Aaron there were successively many high-priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death, this illustrious person, the Lord Jesus Christ, *because he continues ever*, in immortal life and glory, *hath an unchangeable priesthood*¶, or, as the word ** most exactly signifies, a priesthood *which does not pass* from one successor to another. Now, from hence the apostle draws that important inference, in the words of my text, *Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost*, completely and perpetually to save, *all that*, in the remotest ages and nations of the world, desire to come unto God by him, or to make use of his mediation, when they approach the throne of God as humble worshippers, *seeing*

* Gal. ii. 16. † Heb. i. and ii. ‡ Heb. iii. 2—6. § Heb. vii. 4—7.
‖ Heb. vii. 11, & seq. ¶ Heb. vii. 23, 24. ** Απαραβατον.

he ever lives to make a most prevalent *intercession for them;* of which, as the apostle elsewhere more largely states it*, the intercession of the high-priest before the mercy-seat, on the solemn day of atonement, was but a very imperfect type.

It will be the business of several succeeding discourses on these words,

I. To consider what we are to understand by Christ's being able to save to the uttermost.

II. To prove that he is really so.

III. To consider the particular argument for it, which the apostle draws from his *ever living to make intercession for them*, And

IV. To state the character of those who may expect salvation from him, which is here expressed by their coming to God by him.

You see the copiousness of the subject we are entering upon. I shall endeavour in the prosecution of it, to lay before you the genuine doctrine of the gospel on these various and important heads, with plainness and seriousness. And I humbly implore the influence of the divine spirit, to *Open mine eyes, that I may behold the wonders* contained in his word †; and to open your ears so to hear them, and your heart so to embrace them, that every soul here present may be an eternal monument of Christ's being *able to save to the uttermost*, and may for ever live to receive the fruits of that intercession, which our blessed High-priest is ever living to make. Amen.

First, I am to consider what we are to understand by Christ's being *able to save to the uttermost.*

For clearing up this matter, I would only offer these three remarks.—It implies the danger and calamity of those, to whom Christ is proposed as a Saviour;—it expresses a power of working out complete deliverance for them;—and it farther imports the continuance of that saving power without diminution or decay throughout all succeeding generations.

1. When Christ is spoken of as able to save, it strongly implies, "That those, to whom he is proposed as a Saviour, are, without him, in a state of danger and calamity."

It would be a foolish mispending of time to attempt to prove

* Heb. ix. 7. & seq. † Psal. cxix. 18.

at large, that in scripture, as well as in ordinary speech, to save and to deliver, are words of the same import. *Jesus shall save his people from their sins* *; and he *Delivers us from the wrath to come*†.

It is a most obvious remark, but so necessary, as not to be lightly dismissed, that *The whole have no need of a physician, but they who are sick*‡; and the secure have no need of a Saviour, but they who are in danger. And as the apostle argues, that *If Christ died for all; then were all dead*§, all were in a state of death, or they would not have needed such an expiatory sacrifice; so we may assure ourselves, that if Christ is to be offered to all as a Saviour, then were all in a state of ruin. And if he is *Of God to be made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*‖, then are we without him destitute of all these, foolish and guilty, polluted and inslaved, condemned and perishing.

This is expressly asserted in a variety of scriptures, largely and laboriously proved in the three first chapters of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, and generally acknowledged by all who pretend to believe the gospel; as indeed it must be, if they would not in the most notorious manner contradict themselves. Yet, alas, how little is it felt! We see it in the indolence of men's lives; we see it in the air of indifference with which the tidings of salvation are commonly received. The greater part of mankind are soothed into an insensibility of their danger; they are amused with the dreams of sensual pleasure, with the vain rovings of a gay imagination, and the fond expectation of a thousand satisfactions, which they never have found, and never will find in life. And hence it comes to pass, that they hear not the thunder of God's law, loud and dreadful as it is; nor see the flaming sword of his vengeance, stretched out against them, and just ready to give them the mortal blow. And probably it is the case of several among you. Perhaps many of you may find, even on the most transient reflection, that you were never alarmed with a sense of your danger, nor saw yourselves perishing without a Saviour: But if it be so, give me leave to proclaim it aloud, with all the earnestness which is suited to a matter of life and death, that it is time, *High time for you*, immediately *to awake out of sleep*¶; for you nod on the brink of a precipice, and there is but a hand's-breadth between you and eternal ruin.

In the name of God, Sirs, and as you love your own souls,

* Mat. i. 21. † 1 Thess. i. 10. ‡ Mat. ix. 12.
§ 2 Cor. v. 14. ‖ 1 Cor. i. 30. ¶ Rom. xiii. 11.

rouse up your stupified senses, and open those drowsy eyes. Look into the holy law of God, and read over the records of conscience; and see the agreement, or rather the dreadful disagreement, and contrariety between them: Such a contrariety, that one would almost think, you imagined that the commands of God were given to tell you, what you should not do, rather than what you should; and dare you imagine, that the eternal God, with all his almighty power, and all his unspotted holiness, will look with indifference on the violation of his law, merely because you have the boldness to violate it with indifference? Do you think he had no meaning, or that it was not a meaning full of terror, when he told the Israelites of old, that if they presumed thus to walk contrary to him, they should *Be cursed in the city, and cursed in the field, cursed in the fruit of their body, and in the fruit of their ground, cursed in their coming in, and cursed in their going out* *; nay, that *A fire should be kindled in his anger, that should burn even unto the lowest hell; that should consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains*† ? Think you *The scripture speaks in vain*‡, when it says such terrible things as these? Or will you say, these things were only spoken to the Jews of old? Can you imagine, that sins committed in the land of Canaan, some thousands of years ago, should provoke the eyes of God's holiness, and kindle the flames of his wrath; and that he should wink at crimes committed in the present age, and in Britain; while we have higher advantages to know our duty, and stronger engagements to perform it, than even that favourite nation of Israel had? I appeal to your consciences, sinners, whether this thought has even the lightest degree of probability in it. And if it has not, then surely here is danger and horror, in all their most frightful forms. To see the drawn sword of an inexorable enemy, waved round your defenceless head or pointed at your naked breast; or to see this building all in flames, and yourselves surrounded beyond a possibility of escape, were the prospect to terminate there, were a danger at which a man might justly smile, and stand collected and composed, when compared with that into which sin has brought you, and in which the gospel finds you.

And it is a terrible aggravation, that without divine assistance this danger is inevitable. We can neither vindicate our conduct, nor atone for our offences; we can neither avoid, nor endure the punishment, should God lay *Justice to the line, and*

* Deut. xxviii. 16—19. † Deut. xxxii. 22. ‡ Jam. iv. 5.

*righteousness to the plummet**. All our soul is enfeebled, and all our nature corrupted; and he must be a great stranger to himself as well as to the rest of mankind, who will not acknowledge with the apostle, that *When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for us*†. This is apparently the doctrine of the gospel: and as the fore-runner of Christ made way for him, by declaring that men were by their sin in danger of the *Wrath to come*, and that *the axe* of divine judgment *was laid to the root of the trees*‡; so I think it is our duty, as we tender the honour of our Redeemer, and the salvation of your souls, often to be reminding you of these things; and the words of the text so naturally imply them, that I am persuaded you cannot think them a digression. But I add,

2. When it is said, that Christ is *able to save to the uttermost*, it must express "a power of working out complete deliverance for his people."

So some judicious commentators descant upon these words, and I think with a great deal of reason, "he is *able to save in the most perfect manner*, so that nothing shall be wanting to complete the salvation§." And this is a thought of so great importance to our joy and peace in believing, that I will farther illustrate it by the mention of various particulars, which are evidently comprehended in complete salvation. But I shall only touch on them now, because some of them are to be resumed at large under the second general.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is able "completely to answer the demands of justice, and thereby to save us from the curse of the law."—*It was* indeed *impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin*‖, but we may easily believe, that *The blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself a spotless sacrifice to* God¶, should avail to that blessed purpose, and be accepted as an infinitely valuable and adequate satisfaction. Justly may we conclude, that the offended Deity is now rendered propitious, and that by faith in the Redeemer we may be *Justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses***. Here is a door of hope opened, not only to those, who have *escaped the* grosser *pol-*

* Isa xxviii. 17. † Rom. v. 6. ‡ Mat. iii. 7, 10.

§ Εις το παντελες— Perfectè sive ad perfectam æternamque fælicitatem adducere. Estius. Prorsus, vel absolutissimè, ita ut nihil ad eam salutem possit amplius desiderari. Beza, in loc.

‖ Heb. x. 4. ¶ Heb. ix. 14. ** Acts xiii. 39.

lutions which are in the world through lust, and maintained a fair and honourable character for the decency and morality of their behaviour, but even for the *Chief of sinners**. Iniquities that have been *As scarlet*, may be made *white as snow*, and those that have been *red as crimson*, may be as *wool*†.

The almighty power of Christ, as a Saviour, extends to the "sanctification of our natures," as well as to the justification of our persons before God. For he is *Made of God unto us*, not only *righteousness*, but *sanctification*, in order to his being made complete *redemption*‡.——When our own most vigorous efforts fail us, and prove too feeble to break those cords in sunder, by which we are naturally inslaved and disgraced; when we find that to attempt a reformation of our corrupt habits and exorbitant passions, is but as if *The Ethiopian* should labour to *change his skin*, or *the leopard his spots*§; by *The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*, we may be *made free from the law of sin and death*‖, and be formed by his grace to such a temper, as may render our souls a delightful habitation for a holy God. As by his healing touch in the days of his flesh, he removed an inveterate leprosy, which no human methods of cure could reach; so can he diffuse purity and health throughout all the soul, if he put forth his gracious hand, and say, to the most polluted and degenerate creature, *I will; be thou clean*¶. Again,

The Lord Jesus Christ *is able to save* his people, "from all the artifice and power of the prince of darkness."—If that crooked serpent attempt to insinuate himself into the hearts of Christ's people by the most artful methods, he can trace all his winding ways; and as *All the treasures of divine wisdom are hid in him***, he knows how to turn all the most wily practices of this experienced deceiver into his own confusion; to direct every laboured stratagem, and from the most dangerous snares to teach such useful lessons of holy prudence, as shall tend to the future security, as well as the immediate deliverance of his servants.——Or should satan put on the form of a roaring lion, to throw their souls into a trembling horror, it shall appear in this respect as in others, that *The Lion of the tribe of Judah prevails*††. He who has *Spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly on the cross*‡‡, will still assert the conquest he has gained. And it shall appear,

* 1 Tim. i. 15.
§ Jer. xiii. 23.
** Col. ii. 3.
† Isa. i. 18.
‖ Rom. viii. 2.
†† Rev. v. 5.
‡ 1 Cor. i. 30.
¶ Mat. viii. 3.
‡‡ Col. ii. 15.

to the everlasting disappointment and shame of all the host of hell, that it was not a vain boast, but the words of eternal wisdom, as well as invariable faithfulness, when he said, *I will give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand**. Which leads me to add further,

That Christ *is able to save to the uttermost*, as, "he can enable his people to persevere to the end of their course, even in the midst of the most formidable opposition."——The state of a christian is indeed a warfare, and he had need to be completely armed for the combat; but he may depend on being victorious in it, under the conduct of the great Captain of his Salvation, who can *Teach his hands to war, and his fingers to fight, so that even a bow of steel* should be broken by his naturally feeble arms†. Jesus, his great covenant-head, to whom the *Spirit is given without measure*‡, can pour it out in so plentiful a manner, that were a career of labour, or of suffering, arduous and hazardous as that of the blessed apostle Paul, to be opened before the weakest saint, he might say with such composure and intrepidity, as Paul did, *I can do all things*, or am sufficient for all, *through Christ that strengthened me*§; and might repeat the triumph which he has taught us, *What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us*‖.

Our blessed Redeemer is *able to save to the uttermost*, as "he can support his people in death, and receive their spirits to a world of glory."—In that awful hour, when the dearest of their human friends stand around them with tears of unavailing pity, he can command deliverance for them; he can support them, *Though flesh and heart fail*¶, by the lively views of approaching glory, while he strengthens the eye of faith, to *See*, as it were, *heaven opened*, and himself *standing at the right hand of God***, to receive the departing spirit. So that the christian may justly make his exit from off the stage of life, with those graceful words of the apostle, *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that day*††. And when he hath shot the awful gulph, and is cut off from any farther commerce with earth and its

* John x. 28. † Psal. xviii. 34. ‡ John iii. 34. § Phil. iv. 13.
‖ Rom. viii. 35, 37. ¶ Psal. lxxiii. 26. ** Acts vii. 56. †† 2 Tim. i. 12.

inhabitants, he still finds himself in a province of the Redeemer's empire, and feels the important support of that hand, which bears *The keys of death and the unseen world**. And to add no more on this head,

The Lord Jesus Christ is *able to save* his people *to the uttermost*, as "he can raise their bodies from the dissolution of the grave, and conduct their complete persons to the regions of eternal felicity."—He is *The resurrection and the life*†; and though death be the *king of terrors*‡, he knows and owns the conquest of the *king of glory*, who will at length *Swallow* him *up in victory*§; so that there shall be no more remainder of his power, than if he had never invaded any of the subjects of Christ. Their triumphant prince will verify the heroic words of Moses to the Egyptian tyrant, in a far more exalted sense; *There shall not a hoof be left behind*‖. The sleeping dust of his people, wherever it be dispersed, is still within the ken of his discerning eye, and the reach of his almighty hand; and when the appointed hour is come, *All that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth*¶; and so illustrious a *change* shall pass on their *vile bodies, that they shall be fashioned like unto his own glorious body, according to that mighty power whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself***. When this noble work of his power shall be accomplished, and in it the schemes of his love completed, with regard to all his elect, then shall he be *Glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe*††. Experience shall then most amply attest, what such a variety of other evidences is now assuring us of; and the whole redeemed world shall ring with the joyful acknowledgment, that *He is able to save to the uttermost*, in the most complete manner, in the most perfect degree.

I know all these thoughts are common and plain; yet I have insisted thus largely upon them, because they are the great foundations of our faith and hope: And had I been capable of furnishing out any curious and abstruse speculations on the subject, I am sure, that when *laid in the balance* with these sacred and important truths, they would have been lighter than a feather, weighed against talents of gold. But I would proceed to observe,

3. That when it is said, Christ *is able to save to the uttermost*, it may further imply, "That the efficacy of his saving grace continues the same, throughout all succeeding ages."

* Rev. i. 18. † John xi. 25. ‡ Job xviii. 14. § 1 Cor. xv. 54.
‖ Exod. x. 26. ¶ John v. 28, 29. ** Phil. iii. 21. †† 2 Thess. i. 10.

Some very celebrated commentators have taken the phrase in this sense, and rendered it, *He is able always to save*;* and it must be confessed, at the least, that the following connexion evidently proves this to be implied. For the apostle had before observed, that Christ had an *unchangeable priesthood*, that admitted of no successor; and, in the close of the verse, he argues his ability to save, from his *ever living to make intercession;* and therefore it cannot be improper here to touch on this thought, in which ever part of the text we suppose it chiefly to be suggested†.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was *able to save*, from the beginning. His energy wrought from the date of the first promise to our fallen parents, as his saving power and grace were indeed the foundation of it. And still, from that day to the present, has *The seed of the woman* been *bruising the serpent's head‡*, in many instances, which have been as preludes to the complete expected triumph.

By faith in him, under the more obscure discoveries before his incarnation, *The elders obtained a good report§*, and died in expectation of a better resurrection. Their faith embraced him, according to the degree in which he was revealed; they *Saw his day*, in a distant prospect, *and rejoiced‖*; and were received to the divine favour here, and to eternal happiness above in regard to a sacrifice which was yet to be offered, and a righteousness which was yet to be wrought out.

He appeared to be *able to save*, when he dwelt on earth in a tabernacle of clay. Still he mingled the dignity, and power of a God, with the abasements, and infirmities of a mortal man; asserting to himself the divine prerogative of forgiving sins¶;

* Christus non tantum potuit, quando mortalis erat, sed & nunc continuo potest salvare. Estius in loc.

† I cannot think it easy, or necessary, to determine which of these two senses of *saving to the uttermost* is to be preferred; it is certain, both the thoughts are comprehended in the verse. If by saving to the uttermost, we understand saving perpetually, the completeness of the deliverance is comprehended in the word save; if we prefer the other sense of saving completely, that comprehends the perpetuity of it, which is most expressly asserted in the following words. I think Brennius justly unites both, when he explains it, εις το παντελες, perfectè, & in perpetuum; and I have the pleasure to find, since I wrote this, that the great and excellent Dr. Owen explains the text in this extent, almost in the very words I had used above, which therefore I shall not transcribe. See Owen on the Heb. Vol. 3. p. 235, and 238.

‡ Gen. iii. 15. § Heb. xi. 2. ‖ John viii. 56. ¶ Mat. ix. 2, 6. Mat. ix 5, 10. Luke vii. 47, 48.

speaking of a glorious *resurrection, and eternal life*, as his gift* ; representing himself, as the *Head-stone of the corner*†, on whom was fixed all the stress of men's eternal interests ; and as that awful judge, before whose tribunal the greatest of the children of men should stand, and from whom all should receive the decisive sentence, which should fix them in final happiness, or despair‡. Nay, even his deepest humiliation, on the cursed tree, a ray of divine glory broke through that dark cloud of infamy, with which he was then surrounded ; and amidst all the scorn and rage of insulting enemies, who were reproaching him as a wretch abandoned by God and man, he speaks from the cross as from the throne ; and, as the King of heaven, takes upon him to dispose of seats in paradise, and to promise life and glory to one who was then sharing with him in the agonies of death, and the ignominy of crucifixion ; *Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise*§.

Now if he were thus mighty to save, when he dwelt in so humble a form, when he passed through so calamitous a scene ; how much more evidently is he so, amidst all the magnificence of his exaltation in the highest heaven ; whither he has *Ascended*, as a glorious conqueror, having *led captivity captive, and received gifts for men*‖ ? Can we imagine, that an abode of seventeen hundred years at *the right-hand of the Majesty on high*, has *enervated his arm, that he cannot save*, or rendered *his ear heavy that he cannot hear?* It were a thought most evidently absurd ! We may therefore confidently assure ourselves, that he is, at this moment, as able to exert an almighty power for the salvation of his people, as he was on that illustrious day, when he poured out the Spirit on his disciples, at the feast of Pentecost ; or that in which he appeared to Paul, on the way to Damascus, with the glories of heaven new upon him, even with a lustre exceeding that of the meridian sun, and in a moment subdued his stubborn heart, and transformed him from a persecutor to an apostle.

Still is our Redeemer *able to save*, and shall continue to be so. When we, and our children, are laid in the dust of death, he shall be the joy and confidence of a new race of believers ; and to the very end of time, *One generation shall arise, and declare his righteousness to another*¶, and that righteousness shall still retain its original value. This *foundation of God*,

* John vi. 39, 44. x. 28. xi. 25, 26. † Mat. xxi. 42. Mark xii. 10. Luke xxii. 17. ‡ Mat. vii. 22, 23. xxv. 31—46. xxvi. 64. John v. 22—29. § Luke xxiii. 43. ‖ Eph. iv. 8. ¶ Psal. xxii. 31.

shall *stand sure*, though rocks moulder into dust, and the mountains are removed out of their place; yea, when the sun shall fade away in its orb, and all the golden lamps of these lower heavens are extinguished, the sun of glory shall shine forth with undiminished radiancy: And if the work of rescue and deliverance cease, it will be only because danger, and misery shall no longer be known, and the very last of his enemies is completely subdued. Yet still his victorious energy shall continue the same, and it shall be as true of his power, as of his fidelity and grace, that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever**.

I have thus endeavoured to shew you, what we are to understand by this phrase of Christ's being *able to save to the uttermost*.——It implies the danger and misery of those to whom he is proposed as a Saviour;—and evidently expresses a power of working out a complete deliverance,—and the continuance of that power throughout all generations.

I shall conclude this head, and the present discourse, with two very obvious reflections on what I have already delivered—How great is that salvation which the Lord Jesus Christ hath wrought out for us!—and how much are we all concerned very seriously to enquire after it!

1. How great is that salvation, which the Lord Jesus Christ hath wrought out.

We have been taking a survey of many important branches of it; and is it not most evidently worthy of the title that the apostle gives it, when he stiles it, *So great salvation*† ? *So great* indeed it is, that if we compare with it the most illustrious salvations which God wrought out for Israel of old, far from being eclipsed, it will rather be brightened by the comparison; and it will appear how justly he might say, *I, even I, am the Lord, and besides me there is no Saviour*‡; none, that compared with me, deserves that important name.—It was a *great salvation*, which God wrought out for Israe by Moses, when he broke the power of Egypt by repeated blows; when he led the chosen tribes through the red sea, and through the desart, guided by the pillar of cloud and fire, and supplied by heavenly bread, and water streaming from the flinty rock. But the salvation of Christ is ten thousand times more important. A pious Israelite under the rod of an Egyptian oppressor might have risen in holy contemplation and devotion, from the brick-kiln or the

* Heb. xiii. 8. † Heb. ii. 3. ‡ Isai. xliii. 11.

dungeon, to the presence of God as his Father, to a liberty of soul before him, which would have rendered his servitude happier than Pharaoh's royalty: Or should the sword of the tyrant have taken away his life, he would have found the stroke a blessed release, to a state of complete and eternal glory. But our souls, in this state of apostacy, were inslaved to satan, and to sin, we were incapable of spiritual pleasure, we were lost to all future hope; till Jesus appeared, and seasonably came to break the iron yoke of our fatal bondage; to conduct us by his spirit through all the perplexities and danger of the wilderness; and, in our way to the heavenly Canaan, to feed us with the *true bread from heaven*, and to give us that *water of life*, of which if a man drink, he shall *Thirst no more**. Have we not infinite reason to say, this deliverer is *Worthy of more glory than Moses*† ? It was a *great salvation*, that was wrought by Aaron, when the plague was broke out against Israel; when it was running through their ranks, and laying them, in a moment, in the dust of death; and that anointed priest of the Lord, by divine instigation, *took a censer* in his hand, and placing himself *between the dead and the living*, put a stop to the spreading destruction, and *made an* acceptable *atonement for the sins of the people*‡. But how much more prevalent is the atonement of Jesus, our great high-priest, who arose, and stood in the breach to turn away the wrath of God from us; the incense of whose intercession, not only like Aaron's, procures the reprieve of a mortal life, but the favour of God and eternal happiness? But neither Aaron nor Moses, completed the purposes of the divine favour to Israel his people; and it was in some respect a greater salvation than either of these, that Joshua effected, when he led them through Jordan, to the *land of promise*; when he vanquished the Kings of Canaan, and their armies; when he stopped the sun in its career, to give them light to pursue their conquest; till at last he divided the whole country to them, for an inheritance, even the *Land flowing with milk and honey*. But this was only a type of the true Joshua, who having himself conquered our enemies alone, and *Trodden* them down like grapes in *the wine-press*§, causes us to share in the fruit of his victory, by assigning us a settlement in *A better country, that is, an heavenly*‖.—Were I to speak of the succeeding salvations under their judges, and their kings, I should, by mentioning a succession of deliverances, intimate the comparative imperfection of each. In the land of their inheritance Israel sinned

* John iv. 14. † Heb. iii. 3. ‡ Numb. xvi. 47, 48. § Is. lxiii. 3. ‖ Heb. xi. 16.

against the Lord ; and they were chastened there, and oppressed by one enemy after another ; till, at length, the whole nation of them was dispossessed of it, and fell by the sword, or were carried into captivity. But it is the glory of Jesus, our great deliverer, to perfect his work ; conducting his people to a world of everlasting security, from which they can never be expelled, and in which they shall never be molested.—Let then the rod of Moses, and the censer of Aaron, and the sword of Joshua, and the sceptre of David, bow to the superior glories of the cross of Christ, and be laid down in humble reverence at the footstool of his throne. And let our souls adore Jesus the almighty Saviour, and be daily more solicitous to secure an interest in that salvation, which he has introduced. Which leads me to add,

2. How important is it, that we all seriously enquire after this mighty Saviour !

You have all frequently heard of him. Let conscience say, whether you have diligently enquired into the credentials he brings, into the offer he makes, into your own concern in such proposals as these ? I fear, many of you are conscious to yourselves, that you have *neglected* this *great salvation.* Unhappy creatures, *how will you escape*, if you persist in such a neglect !

Yet still, my friends, after all that is past, there will, if God continue our lives a few sabbaths longer, be another opportunity of reviewing these things at large. I am more fully to lay before you the proof that Christ *Is able to save to the uttermost.* the efficacy of his intercession for this blessed purpose, and the character of those who may expect this salvation from him. Let me bespeak the serious attention of all, and particularly of the younger part of my auditors. Let passion, and business, and every worldly vanity be silent ; and let every one *That hath an ear, hear what the Spirit is* still *saying to the churches**, what it is the very life of sinners to know, the duty of every faithful minister often to repeat, and the wisdom of the most established saints often to recollect.

* Rev. iii. 22.

SERMON II.

POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST.

Proofs of his Ability to Save.

Heb. vii. 25.—*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make Intercession for them.*

THOUGH the nature of man be sadly degenerated, and we are *Alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us**; yet there are some remainders of human and social affection, which seem so wrought into the constitution of our soul, as to be as inseparable from us as our being. From hence the mind feels itself delighted with the survey of benevolent actions, no less necessarily, than the eye with the prospect, or the ear with the most harmonious music. Nor can it be merely a regard to our own interest, which adds a relish to such accounts; for we delight to hear them, though the scene be laid in the most distant age or country. Nay, fictions of this kind have a secret charm, which it is not easy to resist, and the pleasure is real, where we know the occasion of it to be only imaginary.

But sure it may be said with the utmost propriety, that as *Eye hath not seen, nor ear*, by credible report, *heard*, so *neither hath it entered into the heart of man* to conceive† any other display of benevolence and goodness, even comparable to that which the gospel presents. All the celebrated exploits of real, or fictitious heroes, are not worth the mention, when compared with those of the great Captain of our Salvation. Were we to contemplate it merely in idea, and to set aside all the evidences of it, and all the remembrance of our own concern in it; yet even then how delightful would the contemplation be! Behold the Son of God, a person to whom the mightiest potentate on earth, the most exalted angel in heaven is but as a worm, divesting himself of celestial glory, putting on him the form of a wretched mortal, and submitting to death in the most horrible shape! For what? to free some single nation from civil bondage? To

* Eph. iv. 18. † 1 Cor. ii. 9.

humble some proud tyrant of the earth? to restore an oppressed people to liberty and peace? or to form uncultivated savages to discipline, arts, and social life? These are great things for a man to do; these may render the name of a prince immortal; but the Lord of glory descends for nobler purposes; to conquer and destroy the tyrant of hell, to rescue from his cruel servitude an innumerable *Multitude of all nations, and people, and kindreds, and tongues**; to form their groveling and degenerate minds to the most useful knowledge, to the noblest sentiments, and the most exalted pleasures; to bring them to the glorious liberty, and inestimable privileges of the children of God; and, finally, to fix them for ever in a state of honour and happiness, from whence they might look down with superior contempt on whatever earth can afford, most grateful to our senses, most amusing to our imaginations, most transporting to our passions.

I have already told you, that all this, and much more than this, is comprehended in the phrase of Christ's being *able to save to the uttermost.* But is all this only a pleasing dream, an agreeable amusement of thought? Is it only what our fancy may paint, and our hearts might wish? Is it a conjecture built on dark probabilities, or precarious reports? No; through the divine goodness we can say, that the proofs of this salvation are as convincing, as its design is amiable, and its blessings important. We proceed therefore,

Secondly, To prove the truth we have explained; or to shew you how evident it is, that the Lord Jesus Christ is *able* thus *to save to the uttermost*, and to complete the salvation of every believer, in every succeeding age of the church and world.

This is an evangelical mystery, which the deepest reach of human reason would not have been able to discover; and which when discovered, in this corrupt state, it is too unwilling to receive. Should I take the proof in its utmost extent, it would be necessary to divide it into two grand branches;—first, to shew that the gospel revelation is true; and then,—that admitting its truth, the almighty power of Christ to save follows, by a most easy and necessary consequence.

The former of these is so extensive a subject, that I shall chuse to handle it apart†:—And to insist at present, on the latter, I hope it will not be thought an unreasonable thing, when addressing an auditory of professed christians, now to

* Rev. vii. 9. † Sermon viii, ix, x.

take it for granted, that the gospel is divine. Allowing it to be so, it will indeed be an easy thing to prove the ability of Christ to save. And did I aim at nothing but abstract argument, the proof might be unanswerably dispatched in a very few words; for as the whole tenor of the gospel supposes it; so a multitude of scriptures directly assert it, and indeed the very words of the text may alone serve most firmly to establish it. But, my brethren, I cannot be contented with your cold and lifeless assent, to so vital, and so important a doctrine. I would prove it, not merely to your understandings, but your consciences. To affect these, various topics of argument are suggested in the word of truth. I will now endeavour to trace them. O that they might be attended with such *demonstration of the Spirit*, that every trembling awakened sinner may be encouraged to venture his soul on this almighty Saviour; and that every christian may be quickened to a more delightful acquiescence in him and being strong in faith, may give more abundant glory to God through Christ!

I would argue then, that our Lord Jesus Christ will evidently appear thus able to save, if we consider,—that he was commissioned by the Father for this great work;—that he appears, in his person and character, eminently fitted for it;—that he has done and borne all that we can imagine necessary to effect it;—that he has been approved by the Father, as having completely answered this glorious design;—that, in consequence of all, he has made such overtures and promises, as imply a full power of accomplishing it; and that, as a convincing specimen of this power, he has already begun, and carried on the salvation of a multitude of souls, whose experience confirms this comfortable truth.

If these particulars be duly considered in their connection with each other, I am persuaded nothing more will be necessary to prove, that Christ *is able to save to the uttermost;* nor could we so much as wish for clearer evidence of it, though it be the great basis of our eternal hopes: Yet, because it is so, I hope you will pardon my indulging, what might otherwise seem a redundancy of proof.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ was "appointed by God to the work of a Saviour," and therefore is able to perform it to the uttermost.

We are sure, that the witness *of God is according to truth*;* and this is his testimony, *That he hath given to us eternal life,*

* Rom. ii. 2.

*and this life is in his Son**. As soon as ever the first intimations of grace and mercy were given to sinful creatures, their eyes were directed to him, as *The* great *Seed of the Woman*, who was to *bruise the serpent's head*†. In succeeding ages he is spoken of as God's *Servant, in whom he delighted;* as *his elect, in whom his soul was well pleased;* and that particularly, while he considered him as the person, who should be given *for a covenant to the people, and for a light to the gentiles*‡. And, to shew how great a stress was to be laid on him, he is sometimes represented as made, by the immediate interposition of God, *The Head-stone of the corner*, though he had been *rejected* by those whose office and profession it was to build up the church§. Nay, he is elsewhere described as the *Foundation-stone* which God himself had *laid in Sion, elect, and precious, a sure and tried Stone*‖, so that *He that believeth on him shall not be confounded*¶. When he was coming into the world, the name of Jesus was given him, on purpose to shew, that he was to *Save his people from their sins***. At his entrance on his public ministry, he was declared, by *A voice from heaven*, to be God's *beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased*††: And through the whole course of it, he was sealed by the Spirit in an extraordinary manner, as the person who was to feed hungry souls with the *Meat which endureth to everlasting life*‡‡.

Now surely, if we were capable of going no farther than this, we might rest here with great satisfaction. The wisdom of God cannot err. He is the sovereign Judge of the fitness of ends, and of means; and where his judgment is declared, we may acquiesce in it without farther debate. Since he appears to have fixed Christ *as a nail in a sure place*§§, we need not fear to hang upon him even the vast weight of our eternal interest. And we might cheerfully have done it, even though God had concealed from us many of those glories of his person, which he has in some measure discovered in scripture. Nevertheless, so far as they are revealed, it is our happiness to know, and our wisdom attentively to consider them; which reminds me of adding,

2. That, so far as we are capable of judging, "the Lord Jesus Christ appears, in his person and character, perfectly fit to accomplish the work to which he is thus divinely appointed," and *to save* his people even *to the uttermost.*

* 1 John v. 11. † Gen. iii. 15. ‡ Isa. xlii. 1, 6. § Psal. cxviii. 22.
‖ Isa. xxviii. 16. ¶ 1 Pet. ii. 6. ** Mat. i. 21. †† Mat. iii. 17.
‡‡ John vi. 27. §§ Isa. xxii. 23, 24.

For the illustration of this great argument, it will be proper for us humbly to view him, in his glorious appearance, under the title of the great *Emmanuel, God with us** in our nature; and to regard him as *God manifested in* human *flesh*†. For the mysterious union of the divine and human natures in the person of our blessed Redeemer, is that which renders him the secure confidence of our souls, *An anchor both sure and stedfast*‡.

Even in the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is that which appears admirably suited to the blessed design of our redemption. The apostle tells us, that *Forasmuch as the children*, whom he undertook to conduct unto glory, are *Partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same*§. He was indeed *Bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh;* and thus became capable of yielding that obedience to his Father's law, and making that atonement to his justice, which had otherwise been impossible. It was *Necessary, that he should have somewhat to offer*‖; he therefore assumed a mortal body, that he might offer it as *A sacrifice to God of a sweet smelling savour*¶.

And that it might be so, it was absolutely requisite, that he should be an immaculate Lamb. He was therefore such a victim, and *Such an high-priest as became us*, being perfectly *holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners***. Nor was he only free from every degree of stain and pollution, but by his own voluntary consent was *made under a law*, to which he was by no necessity of nature subject; that he might *Bring in* a complete and *everlasting righteousness*††, *By the knowledge* of which, having borne their sins, he might *justify many*‡‡.

Again, as he was perfectly fit for this great office with respect to the holiness and purity of his character; so he was completely furnished for it by the most plentiful effusions of *The holy Spirit*, which was *given to him without measure*§§, and poured out upon him as the *Oil of gladness*, with which he was *anointed*‖‖ *above* any of those, who by divine grace were appointed to be the humble *partners* of his glories. It not only descended on him, and resided in him; but from him it streameth forth, as water from a fountain. He was appointed to *Baptise* his people *with the Holy Ghost and with fire*¶¶, with a spirit of wisdom, of zeal, and of holiness, as well as with that miraculous energy which wrought in so powerful a manner in the first of his servants, whom he sent forth to publish his gospel in the world.

* Mat. i. 23. † 1 Tim. iii. 16. ‡ Heb. vi. 19. § Heb. ii. 14.
‖ Heb. viii. 3. ¶ Eph. v. 2. ** Heb. vii. 26. †† Dan. ix. 24.
‡‡ Isa. liii. 11. §§ John iii. 34. ‖‖ Psal. xlv. 7. ¶¶ Mat. iii. 1.

But is this all that we can say of our Redeemer's fitness to answer the glorious character under which he appeared, and to effect the important work he undertook? That he was an excellent and holy man, and furnished with an uncommon degree, both of the miraculous gifts, and the sanctifying graces of the Spirit? No, christians, we are very thankful, that *We have not so learned Christ**. We have been taught to adore him, as *Over all, God blessed for ever*†; as *The brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person*‡; as *Jehovah our righteousness*§; *Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God*‖; and took upon himself no higher character than what he had a right to claim, when he spake of himself, in his appearances to the saints under the Old Testament, as the *living and true God*, as a person properly divine. Here, my brethren, here is the most glorious evidence of his being *able to save to the uttermost*. We should dread the *curse* pronounced on the *Man that maketh flesh his arm*¶, should we repose all the trust and confidence of our souls on created power and goodness, and wisdom and fidelity, appearing in a human, or we may add, even in an angelic form. But how cheerfully may we trust the merit of his atonement, and the efficacy of his grace, when we consider him as that glorious and wonderful person, *In whom dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily***. Permit me on this occasion to resume some of the heads of my former discourse, and briefly to shew how they are illustrated by this important thought.

Well may our *Souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour*††; for surely *In his name*, we may courageously *set up our banners*‡‡, against the various legions of surrounding enemies. Let conscience marshal our sins in order before us, as a mighty army, in the most dreadful array; let it charge us home with the *exceeding sinfulness* of each; and with that dreadful eloquence, which is peculiar to itself, aggravate each as a kind of infinite evil: There cannot be a malignity of any of them, or in all, greater than the efficacy of that sacred blood, which was poured forth to expiate them. Had it been merely *the blood* of a whole hecatomb *of bulls or of goats*, of innocent men, or even of the holy angels, should they for such a purpose have become incarnate, we might still perhaps have been ready to object. Where is the proportion between the offence, on one hand, and the satisfaction on the other? But we see it

* Eph. iv. 20. † Rom. ix. 5. ‡ Heb. i. 3.
§ Jer. xxiii. 6. ‖ Phil. ii. 6. ¶ Jer. xvii. 5.
** Col. ii. 9. †† Luke i. 46, 47. ‡‡ Psal. xx. 5.

here, when we consider that the *Church of God is redeemed with his own blood**. In that blood, we behold the honours of the divine law most gloriously displayed, and the rights of his government so strenuously asserted, that we can easily believe, that neither will be injured, by pardoning the most aggravated offences, with a view to such an atonement.

Let Satan appear in every form of artifice, or of rage, possessed, as he is, of such formidable remainders of angelic knowledge, or angelic strength. We know, that *By Christ were all things created, whether visible or invisible*, not excepting *thrones and dominions, principalities and powers*†. So that all the knowledge, and all the force, which this prince of hell could ever boast, even in his primæval state, when a shining cherub in the regions of glory, was only a feeble reflection of the glories of his great original. *His hand formed this crooked serpent*‡; and how easily can his hand crush him, and enable even the weakest of his servants, to trample him *under their feet*§?

Storms of passion are sometimes rising, and the floods of corrupt nature are often beating fiercely on the soul; but he that *stills* the foaming, and the roaring of *the sea*‖, can command this tempest into a calm. He that created us at first, *Can create us anew*, can *deliver us from every evil work, and preserve us to his heavenly kingdom*¶.

Though difficulties, and dangers, and death itself lie in the way to our complete salvation, a divine power can arm us against all. While the *Spirit of the Lord* is with us, though destitute of all other might, vast *mountains* shall spread themselves into *a plain* before us**. Destruction itself shall hear his voice, and nature shall a second time rise out of its chaos, to wear a brighter face of order and of beauty. For *God brings down to the grave, and raises again*††. And since Christ is the Son of God by a *generation* which none can fully *declare*‡‡, by a union which none can fully comprehend; we may easily believe, that those who *Sleep in the dust shall come forth* at his call §§, and that nothing shall be wanting to the everlasting security, and complete happiness of those whom he will condescend to own as his people.

You will not blame me, that I have insisted thus copiously on the argument taken from the divinity of our Redeemer's person, to prove the extent of his power to save; considering the

* Acts xx. 28. † Col. i. 16. ‡ Job xxvi. 13. § Rom. xvi. 20.
‖ Psal. lxv. 7. ¶ 2 Tim. iv. 18. ** Zech. iv. 7. †† 1 Sam. ii. 6.
‡‡ Isa. liii. 8. §§ Dan. xii. 2.

stress he himself lays upon it in those memorable words, *I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand: My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one**; his omnipotence is therefore mine; and in that my sheep are secure.

3. "The Lord Jesus Christ has done all that we can imagine necessary, in order to effect and secure our salvation;" and therefore we may conclude that *he is able to save to the uttermost.*

You have heard something of the glories of the Redeemer's person; and I trust you are not entirely strangers to the riches of his grace. I hope I may say with the apostle, *You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich*†. You know that *He emptied himself* of that original glory, which he wore in the heavenly world, *and took upon him the form of a servant, being found in fashion as a man*‡. You know that he submitted to the inconveniences and sorrows of a mortal life, and at last, to the agonies of an accursed death to atone the injured justice of God, to purchase forfeited happiness for his people, to procure for them the sanctifying influences of the spirit, and to furnish out those endearing considerations, whereby their hearts are constrained to holy obedience, more effectually than by all the terrors of the Lord; constrained, perhaps, I may say, more powerfully, as well as more sweetly, than by any arguments drawn merely from a view to their own interest, and the prospects of a future reward: For *Love is strong as death*§, and in some remarkable instances has proved much stronger. I might add, that having finished his glorious embassy on earth, and closed the scene of his labours and sufferings, he at length returned into heaven, *There to appear in the presence of God for us*‖; to present before him the blood which he shed on the cross, and in virtue of it to make continual intercession for us; using all his interest in the court of heaven, in favour of his unworthy servants on earth. But this would lead me into another branch of my subject, which I must reserve to a future discourse. And I content myself, for the present, with observing, that though we could not by the light of unassisted reason have known all these things to be necessary, yet now they are discovered to us,

* John x. 28—30. † 2 Cor. viii. 9. ‡ Phil. ii. 7, 8.
§ Cant. viii. 6. ‖ Heb. ix. 24.

we find them to be very fit and reasonable; and cannot imagine that any thing more is requisite, completely to accomplish the work of a Saviour. But blessed be God, we have a still surer foundation for our confidence here; for if any should urge, what is indeed true, that we are not competent judges of the rights of God the supreme governor, we may with great pleasure answer,

4. "That the father hath declared his full approbation of what Christ has done, under the character of a Saviour," and thereby given us the most glorious proof, that *he is* indeed *able to save to the uttermost*.

His power to save, as a mediator, is evidently founded on the efficacy of that atonement, which he presented to the Father for the sins of his people. We wonder not, if his disciples were under some alarm, while he hung on the cross, and appeared to an eye of sense incapable of delivering himself; while they heard his insulting enemies cry out, *He saved others, himself he cannot save**. We wonder not, that while his sacred body slept in the dust of death, the faith of his servants was weak, and their fears strong; so that they said with a trembling uncertainty, *We trusted, this had been he that should have redeemed Israel*†. But God raised Christ from the dead; and with him he raised our hope, and our confidence. Thus he *Declared him to be the Son of God with power*‡; and shewed that the demands of his justice were satisfied, since otherwise his prisoner could not have been released. Nay, in order to declare it in the most convincing manner, God appointed that his Son's resurrection should be attended with circumstances of peculiar honour; *An angel descending from heaven to roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre*§; and *two angels* being employed to wait there, to give his dejected followers the first welcome notices of this great event‖.

Nor must I by any means omit the mention of that very illustrious and important circumstance, his ascension into heaven, in the presence of his apostles; *A cloud*, as a triumphant chariot, *receiving him out of their sight*; and angels at the same time descending to assure them, that he who was then rising to mansions of glory, should another day appear conspicuous to every eye, when he should return under the character of the universal Judge ¶.

His being admitted to *Sit down at the right hand of the*

* Mat. xxvii. 42. † Luke xxiv. 21. ‡ Rom. i. 4.
§ Mat. xxviii. 2. ‖ Luke xxiv. 4, & seq. ¶ Acts i. 9—11.

*Majesty on high**, and sending down, upon his intercession there, the miraculous endowments of the Spirit, on the apostles, at the day of Pentecost, are incontestible and everlasting evidences of the divine acceptance, and therefore of his saving power. And surely we cannot entertain a doubt of it, when we consider, that *He is gone into heaven, angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject to him*† ; and is there constituted by the designation of the Father, *Head over all things to the church*‡.

5. I might further argue the ability of Christ to save, " from the gracious promises of salvation which he has made, either in his own person, or by those who had a commission from him."

You know those important and encouraging passages so well, that it will not be needful for me largely to insist upon them. You know, how plainly they express an extent of grace, reaching even to the most enormous sinners; and therefore, how clearly they imply a correspondent extent of power. He invited *All that labour and are heavy laden to come to him ;* and promised on their application to him, that *he would give them rest*§. He proclaimed, in a numerous assembly, on a day of public festivity, that every *thirsty* soul should be most cordially welcome to *come unto him and drink*‖ ; and assures his hearers elsewhere, that *He will by no means cast out any who should come*¶. The apostle Peter declares, that *By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses***, and consequently not by the law of innocence, which left no room for repentance. And St. Paul had his authority to assure us, not only that *Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom himself was chief ;* but he adds, that it was *For this* very *cause* that *he obtained mercy, that in him first*, or rather in him as the chief, *Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to such as should hereafter believe*††.———Now, let me intreat you to consider what I have already said, of the dignity of his person, the glory of his kingdom, and the sanctity of his character ; and then say, whether infidelity itself can suggest so unworthy a thought as this, that *Jesus, the Son of God, the Lord of glory, the faithful and true witness*, should ever mock and delude wretched mor-

* Heb. i. 3. † 1 Pet. iii. 22. ‡ Eph. i. 22. § Mat. xi. 28.
‖ John vii. 37. ¶ John vi. 37. ** Acts xiii. 39. †† 1 Tim. i. 15. 16. εν εμοι πρωτῳ

tals, by the offers of a salvation, which nevertheless he knows he is not able to bestow? *That be far from thee*, O gracious Lord! and be that base and absurd suspicion as far from us! But to add no more on this head,

6. "We may very surely and comfortably argue, from the instances, in which the saving power of Christ hath already been displayed," that *He is able to save to the uttermost.*

There is nothing, that strikes the mind of a wise man, like fact. Experiments do sometimes strengthen our assent to those propositions, which have been demonstrated to us, even in methods of mathematical proof; at least they impress the mind with a peculiar kind of conviction, which nothing else is capable of giving. Now, blessed be God, there is a *cloud of witnesses* to attest this sacred truth, that Christ has begun, and carried on the salvation of a multitude of souls.

Let us look back to the history of former ages, and see how many, who were once sunk into the lowest degeneracy, have been renewed to a divine life by the gospel of Christ. What multitudes, who were once even the reproach of our nature, have been *Washed* and *sanctified*, and *justified*, *in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit* communicated from him*. Reflect on the former, and the latter conquests of divine grace; and you will see, that even *the chief of sinners* have not been beyond its reach.

And I persuade myself, the subject will appear to be farther confirmed by the experience of some who hear me this day. Are there not many of you, my friends, who find a most happy alteration in yourselves, when compared with what you once were? Are there not many, whose eyes, once spiritually blind, have been opened, and their deaf ears unstopped? May I not say to you, my brethren, as Paul to the Ephesians, *You have been quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins*†. For that it was indeed his work, that it was wrought by his gospel, and by his Spirit, you are as sure, as that it has been wrought at all.

Nay, to advance yet farther in this argument, let faith unveil the eye of the soul, and help it to look forward to a world invisible to sense. View it in the light thrown upon it by scripture, of whose divine authority you are so abundantly assured; and what a delightful spectacle will open itself there! What shining forms of holiness, and of joy! What an innumerable triumphant *Multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and people,*

* Cor. vi. 11. † Eph. i. 1.

and tongues !* How loud do their praises sound ! With what unutterable rapture do their souls overflow, too big to be expressed, even by the language of heaven ! Now, if it be asked, as it once was, *Who are these, that are clothed in white robes ? And from whence came they ?* The answer may be given as there, *They are come out of great tribulation :* They were once the inhabitants of earth, heirs to the infirmities and sorrows of this mortal state ; and the most excellent of them, even they who sacrifice their lives in the defence of the truth, and sealed it with their own blood, even they *Have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*†. They owe it to his atonement and righteousness, that they are now holy and glorious creatures ; and each of them will be an everlasting monument of his power, as well as of his grace. And surely when we view them in the joys and glories of the intermediate state, we may well assure ourselves, that he who has saved them thus far, *Is able to save to the uttermost !* And we can no more doubt, whether he can raise their bodies from the tomb, than we could have doubted, whether he could untie the linen bands in which Lazarus was held, when we had seen him *Loosing the bands of death*, and animating his corpse after it had begun to putrify‡.

Nothing more can be requisite to prove the truth. I persuade myself, you are convinced, that Christ *is able to save to the uttermost ;* and I hope, you feel your hearts impressed, as well as your judgments satisfied. But I cannot dismiss the subject, till I have added a few reflections upon it.

Now I shall omit some, which might naturally arise from what I have already said, because they will occur afterwards with greater advantage ; and shall content myself with suggesting these two, which I recommend to your farther consideration. How great is the danger of those, that reject and affront this Almighty Saviour !—And how groundless are the fears of those, that have ventured their souls upon him !

1. How great is the danger and misery of those, that reject and affront such an Almighty Saviour !

If he is *able to save*, he is also able to destroy ; to *Break his enemies with a rod of iron, and to dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel* §. Alas, sinners, though your ingratitude be so foul, though your treatment of Christ be so odious, as to

* Rev. vii. 9. † Rev. vii. 13, 14. ‡ John xi. 43, 44. § Psal. ii. 9.

move the astonishment, as well as the indignation, of all that view him and you, in a just, that is, in a scripture light; yet my heart is both grieved and terrified for you, when I think, what the end of your opposition to him will be. Unhappy creatures! *What will you do, when he rises up? And when he judges, what will you answer him* ?* When he proceeds to execute his sentence, how will you escape, or resist, or endure it? Were it merely the indignation of a man like yourselves, you might either oppose it, or bear it. But, alas, how insupportable will be the vengeance of an almighty arm! If it could alone bring salvation, it will alone be able to bring calamity and ruin. Yet were auxiliary force necessary, all the legions of heaven would appear armed against you, under the command of Jesus their Lord. If you do indeed believe your bibles, I wonder that you do not tremble, when you read, or hear, of that dreadful day, in which you are to be so intimately concerned; when it is expressly said, that the most insolent of his enemies shall flee before him in wild and helpless consternation; when *The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men*, as well as others of meaner rank, *shall hide themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains, and shall say to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand†?* What a dreadful emphasis is there in these words! How plainly do they intimate, that they would prefer the crush of a mountain to the more insupportable weight of his wrath; and that they will have more hope of moving rocks by their intreaties, than of prevailing on their then inflexible judge? And will your *Hearts endure, or your hands be strong*, when the *Heavens shall depart as a scroll*, and mountains and islands shall be removed? Were the least of the servants of Christ this day addressing himself to an assembly of the greatest princes and potentates on earth, he might be bold to say in the name of this king of glory, *Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth: Serve the Lord with* humble *fear, and rejoice* in your own dignity, or in the offers of his grace, *with trembling: Kiss the Son* of God, in token of your ready submission to his government: *lest he be angry, and you perish from the way* in a moment, *when his wrath is kindled* against you. And this faithful and necessary warning would I now

* Job xxxi. 14. † Rev. vi. 15—17.

address to you, adding, as the psalmist doth, *Blessed are all they, that put their trust in him* ;* which leads us to the other reflection,

2. How unreasonable are the fears of those, that have ventured their souls upon Christ!

Too frequently does the humble christian, in the view of all his difficulties, his dangers, and his enemies, secretly borrow the word of David in his melancholy frame, and say, *I shall one day perish by their hand† :* But as the anointing oil of God was upon him, he preserved him in all, and made him victorious over all: And it was an emblem of the victory of the christian, under the conduct of Christ, and the anointings of his spirit. It is very dishonourable to Christ, as well as very uncomfortable to ourselves, to be continually terrified and alarmed, while under the care of such a helper, who declares himself the Lord mighty to save; and the devil gains a great advantage against the soul, by throwing it into such panic terrors: The succours of reason are then betrayed, and the nobler relief of faith in some measure intercepted. And therefore let the particulars I have now been illustrating be often recollected, and frequently plead them with your own hearts. "Oh my soul, is there any thing so peculiar in thy case, that he who has saved so many millions cannot save thee? Has Satan acquired any new power, since Jesus conquered him on the cross? or can I imagine, that hell shall now begin to triumph over heaven, and the Almighty Shepherd be at length repulsed by these infernal wolves, so as to stand by, a helpless spectator, while they are destroying his sheep? How blasphemous, and how detestable a thought! My soul, thou art in the hands of Christ; and by a new act of faith, I do this moment commit thee to him, as *able to save to the uttermost, those that come unto God by him.*" Nor is that additional encouragement light and inconsiderable, which may be derived from the concluding words, *Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.* But this great argument will be handled at large in the following discourse.

* Psal. ii. 10—12. † 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

SERMON III.

POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST.

His Power argued from His Intercession.

Heb. vii. 25.——*Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make Intercession for them.*

AS we have already endeavoured both to open, and to confirm this great truth, that Christ *is able to save to the uttermost*, we are now,

Thirdly, to consider the particular argument, which the apostle suggests in proof of it, in the words of the text, which is drawn from his *ever living to make intercession for his people.*

In handling this, it will be evidently proper, first, to state the doctrine of Christ's intercession ; and then, to consider, how it tends to demonstrate the extent of his saving power. What little time may remain, when these are dispatched, will be employed as usual in a few reflections.

I. I shall endeavour to state the scripture doctrine of Christ's intercession.

Now the substance of this doctrine appears to me to be this. Christ's intercession for his people, is his pleading for them in heaven,——under the character of their great High-priest ; which he always does virtually, by appearing before God, in that body in which he suffered ; and which he always intends to present before him in this view,—in favour of each of his people ;—and this intercession, whether it ever be, or be not, vocal,—is always conducted in a manner becoming the dignity of our exalted Redeemer,—and is abundantly effectual for the security, acceptance, and final happiness of all his servants.

Permit me a little more distinctly to open each of these particulars ; and the rather, as some of them must be acknowledged to have their difficulties ; and as it is fit we should settle some rational and digested notions of a doctrine, of such daily use and such great importance.

1. " The word*, which is here made use of to express Christ's intercession, does properly signify pleading."

* Ἐντυγχανειν.

It is evident from the use of it in other Greek writers, and especially those of the New Testament, that it imports, "an earnest address to one person on account of another:" And according to the participle with which it is joined, it may express the action of a friend, or of an enemy; as a person may in our own language be said to plead for, or against another. Thus on the one hand, *Elijah* is said to have *made intercession to God against Israel**; and the *Jews* to have dealt, or as the original word is, to have *interceded with Festus, that Paul might be put to death*†. On the other hand, Paul exhorts Timothy, *That intercession be made for all men*‡; and elsewhere speaks of *The Spirit's helping our infirmities* in prayer, and so in effect *making intercession for us*§, i. e. as he renders our prayers, both as to the matter, and manner of them, agreeable to the will of God. In this sense also, in the same chapter, as well as in the text, it is said, that Christ being risen *maketh intercession for us*, i. e. he pleads our cause with the Father‖. And St. John likewise encourages us with this thought; *If any man sin*, as there is not a just man upon earth, who does not, *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; who is the propitiation for our sins*¶, by that expiatory sacrifice, on which he pleads; in sweet harmony with those memorable words of Isaiah**, *He poured out his soul unto death, and in* consequence of that, *he made intercession for the transgressors:* To which words, it is probable, that Philo may refer, when, speaking of the Logos, or word, he says among many other surprising things, "He is an intercessor for mortal man with the immortal God††." You see then, that Christ's *intercession* signifies his pleading the cause of his people with the Father; and therefore must import a part of his work as Mediator; and in its fullest extent comprehends his office, both as an advocate in the court, and a priest in the temple. But I add,

2. That in this connection, "it is evidently spoken of as a branch of his priestly office," typified by the ministration of Aaron and his sons, in the Jewish tabernacle.

This, as I formerly shewed you‡‡, the context very plainly proves: Under the law *there were many priests*, &c. *but this man, because he continued ever, hath an unchangeable priest-*

* Rom. xi. 2. † Acts xxv. 24. ενετυχον. ‡ 1 Tim. ii. 1. § Rom. viii. 26.
‖ Rom. viii. 34. ¶ 1 John ii. 1, 2. ** Isa. liii. 12.
†† Ικετης μεν εστι τω θνητω ανθρωπος του αφθαρτου, Philo. Jud. p. 272.
‡‡ See Sermon I.

hood; wherefore he is able also to save, &c. and then it immediately follows, *For such an High-priest became us.* And a very few verses after, the apostle observes, that the sum of what he had here spoken was this; *We have such an High-priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens**. So that seeing Christ's intercession in our text is so evidently a sacerdotal or priestly act, we may, no doubt, be assisted in our conceptions of it, by considering that of the Jewish priests, to which it is compared. Now you know, it was their office, to present their prayers to God in the name of the people, both in their daily, and their yearly ministration. In their daily ministration, they went into the holy place, to *burn incense before the Lord* on the golden altar; and this *incense* is often referred to in scripture, as an emblem of the acceptable prayers of pious worshippers†. And it is observable, that at the very time when the *priest* was thus employed, the *people stood praying without*‡; and no doubt, it was a part of his duty to concur in the devotions, which in their name he presented before God. But this intercession was most solemnly made once a year, i. e. on the great day of atonement, when the *High-priest entered into the most holy place*, with the *blood* of the victims, the incense at the same time fuming, with a grateful odour, before *the mercy-seat* §. This was the grand act of intercession; by attending to which, we may be more particularly informed of the nature of that, which Christ as our high-priest is making in our favour: And we particularly learn,

3. That "the appearance of Christ above, in that body in which he suffered on earth, is virtually a continual intercession with the Father."

We are told, that the high-priest carried the blood of the burnt-offering, and of the sin-offering, into the most holy place, and sprinkled it before the Lord there; and by this action he is said to make the atonement, the other sacrificial circumstances being only preparatory to this ‖. And thus our Lord Jesus Christ has taken into heaven the human body, in which he *bare our sins* on the accursed tree ¶; and appearing thus in the divine presence, he does thereby present his own blood before the mercy-seat: As the apostle expresseth it, in a most evident allusion, to the preceding passage in the Mosaic institution**, *Not with the blood of goats and calves*, which were the sacrifices

* Heb. viii. 1. † Psal. cxli. 2. Rev. viii. 4. ‡ Luke i. 10. § Lev. xvi. 12, 13.
‖ Lev. xvi. 14—19. ¶ 1 Pet. ii. 24. ** Heb. ix. 12.

appointed on the day of expiation, *but by his own blood, he hath entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us:* And *by* this *one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified*;* so that nothing farther should be requisite, for the complete expiation of their guilt. And it is accordingly declared, that *After he had offered one sacrifice for sin,* he *for ever sat down at the right hand of God†.*

Now this appearance of Christ in heaven, which is expressed by his *Standing in the midst of the throne, as a lamb that had been slain‡,* may properly be called a virtual intercession. There is a language in that circumstance, more forcible than in any words that we can imagine. This is happily illustrated by the pious Mr. Flavel§, by the story of Amyntas and Æschylus, as Ælian relates it. Æschylus was condemned to death by the Athenians, and was just going to be led to execution. His brother Amyntas had signalized himself in the service of his country; and on the day of a most illustrious victory, in a great measure obtained by his means, had lost his hand. He came into the court just as his brother was condemned, and without saying any thing, drew the stump of his arm from under his garment, and held it up in their sight; and the historian tells us, "that when the judges saw this mark of his sufferings, they remembered what he had done, and discharged his brother, though he had forfeited his life‖." Thus does Christ, our dear elder brother, silently, but powerfully, plead for our forfeited lives: And such is the happy consequence. His Father looks on the marks of his sufferings, and remembers what he has done; and in this sense *His blood* is continually *speaking better things than the blood of Abel¶. We have an advocate with the Father, who is also the propitiation for our sins**.*

4. "Our Lord always intends, that his appearance before his Father in heaven should be interpreted as a plea for his people."

He does not only perform an action, which may be so understood; but it is his habitual and constant desire and intention, that it may be considered in that view. He entered into heaven, not merely that he might in his glorious human nature be

* Heb. x. 14. † Heb. x. 12. ‡ Rev. v. 6. § Flavel's Fountain of Life, p. 142.

‖ Ælian. Var. Hist. v. 19. ειδον οι δικαστ αι τω ανδρι το παθει, υπεμνησθησαν των εργων αυτου, και αφηκαν τον Αισχυλον.

¶ Heb. xii. 24. ** 1 John ii. 1, 2.

honoured with exalted dignity, and be delighted with that fulness of joy which is in the presence of God there; but that as their *Forerunner*, he *might prepare a place for them**. Still he remembers, that he is made *Head over all things to his church, which is his body*†, and which, with constant tenderness, he *Nourisheth and cherisheth*‡. This is the language of his compassionate heart: "Behold me, Oh my heavenly Father, behold me in a form thus different from that, in which I originally was. Behold me, now dwelling in human flesh; and remember where this flesh was assumed; and remember how it was once treated. When thou saidst, *Sacrifice and offering I will not;—I said, lo, I come*§; *I* delighted then *to do thy will*, and I still delight to recollect that I did it. Thou wast a witness to that awful scene; nor canst thou forget this blood, that was once offered to thee on the cross, to assert the honours of thy law, and to appease the terrors of thy wrath. Thou didst once own it, as *An offering of a sweet-smelling savour*‖; and wilt thou not still own it? I have performed my part of the covenant; and I cheerfully put in my claim to the performance of thy part, in favour of those for whom I descended and died. *Father, I will, that those whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am*¶; and that nothing be wanting to begin, to carry on, and to complete the salvation of every one of them." Thus does our Lord even now own his people in the *presence of his Father, and of his holy angels;* and in the administration of his mediatorial kingdom, he does *all things for the elect's sake*, for whom he once *endured all.*

5. This gracious intention and care of Christ respects, not only his church in general, but "every particular believer, in all the variety of his personal circumstances."

When the jewish high-priest *Stood before the Lord, he bore in his heart the names* of the twelve tribes of Israel**: But Christ our great High-priest bears on his heart, not only the names of the various nations, and tribes, and families of his people, but the name of every individual person amongst them, even of *All the children of God who are scattered abroad*††. So that "he is mindful of me," may every humble believer say, "and each of my concerns, as if I were the only happy creature under his care." Thus, as *The good shepherd*, he is

* Heb. vi. 20. † Eph. i. 22, 23. ‡ Eph. v. 29.
§ Heb. x. 5, 7. ‖ Eph. v. 2. ¶ John xvii. 24.
** Exod. xxviii. 29. †† John xi. 52.

said to *know all his sheep by their names*;* and is described as accommodating himself with a proper care to the necessities of each, as *Seeking that which was lost, and bringing again that which was driven away, and binding up that which was broken, and strengthening that which was sick†; as gathering the lambs in his bosom, and gently leading those that are with young‡.* His eye is still upon each of them, and his heart is tenderly affected toward each. And while, as a Mediator, he presents the prayers of each unto the Father, he intermingles his own intercession, not only that an answer of peace may be returned to them, but that other necessary blessings may be given in, and that they may be preserved from danger by them unseen: As in the days of his flesh, he foresaw the trials of Peter and his brethren, and *Prayed for them that their faith might not fail§;* when they were under no apprehensions for themselves.

6. "The scripture does not expressly determine, whether there be, or be not some verbal address of Christ to the Father, in favour of his people."

Some very eminent divines have indeed positively concluded, that there is none‖. But I cannot think that so certain, as they have supposed it. It is true, we know but very little of the heavenly world, of the methods of converse, or worship there. We know not in what accents its blessed inhabitants address their songs of praise to God, or *Cry to each other, saying, holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty*¶. But this we assuredly know, that our Redeemer is gone into heaven in his human body, though now, in an admirable and inconceivable manner, refined and beautified, invigorated and adorned. And we know, that since his entrance into his glory, he has not only appeared in a visible form to some of his servants on earth, but spoken to them with an audible voice. And must we say, that he still dwells in everlasting silence above; or that, if he speaks, it is only the language of authority to his celestial subjects? Is it absolutely certain that his sacred voice is never employed in any of the triumphant songs of heaven; or that it is never addressed to his

* John x. 3, 14. † Ezek. xxxiv. 16. ‡ Isa. xl. 11. § Luke xxii. 32.

‖ The great Dr. Owen expressly asserts, "He interceedeth not orally in heaven at all." Owen on the Spirit, p. 445. So Scott's Christian Life, vol. 3. p. 763. and many others.

¶ Isa. vi. 3. Rev. iv. 8.

Father in the language of prayer! On earth, he importunately asked those blessings for his people, which he knew that his Father had, by the covenant of redemption, expressly stipulated to bestow: And when he was returning to the regions of glory, he said, *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter**. Now can we say, there is any thing in a vocal, more than in a mental prayer, unworthy the character of the Son of God, and the Lord of all?

We cannot indeed imagine, that our Lord is always thus employed. We know he has other business in the world of glory, with which a continued address to the Father would be inconsistent. But how are we confident, that nothing of this kind passed, when he first ascended to *The right hand of the Majesty on high*; or that such an intercession has never since been repeated? I would stand at the remotest distance from a bold intrusion into these unseen things; but I must presume so far as to say, that I see no absurdity in granting, that some scripture passages we have just referred to, may be taken in a more literal sense, than many have allowed. Nor can I imagine, that the supposed silence of the high-priest, when he entered into the most holy place, can have much weight in the present question: For not now to urge, how possible it is, that he might then use some words of prayer, though no form be prescribed for this, or any other peculiar service of the day; it is certain, that he was then alone in the divine presence: Whereas Jesus, *The great High-priest of our profession*, is surrounded with *An innumerable company of angels, and* with *the spirits of just men made perfect*‡. But after all, I will assert nothing positively here; and to prevent the mistake of what I have already said, I think it proper to add,

7. That in whatever manner this intercession may be carried on, we may depend upon it, that it is "always congruous to that dignity and authority, in which our Lord appears in the world above."

When our Redeemer was on earth in the days of his humiliation, *He poured out strong cryings and tears* §; when addressing his Father, he *fell on his knees*, and sometimes prostrated himself *on his face* ‖: But now sorrow and abasement are no more. He is described, as *Sitting on the right hand of God* ¶; and to raise the idea, is represented by the prophet, as a *Priest*

* John xiv. 16. Comp. John xvii. 9, 20; and xvi. 26. † Heb. xii. 22, 23.
‡ Heb. v. 7. § See Luke xxii. 41. Mat. xxvi. 39. ‖ Mark xvi. 19.

*on his throne**. And the language of his intercession is princely too; *Father, I will, that those whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am*†.

And I must farther add, that his addresses to the Father, in favour of his people, are also "perfectly consistent with his administration of the affairs of his mediatorial kingdom." *All power is given* to him *both in heaven and on earth*‡; and *God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name*§, having said unto him, *Sit thou at my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool*‖. He is, as it were, the grand Almoner of heaven, by whom the divine bounties are dispensed. In his hand are the ways, the hopes, the lives of all; and even the *keys of death*, and of the unseen world¶. We are not therefore to think of any intercession inconsistent with this, if we would make our scheme agreeable to scripture, or scripture consistent with itself. I add once more,

8. The intercession of our blessed Redeemer "is always effectual, for the vindication, the acceptance, and the final happiness of his people."

He is, as the apostle stiles him, *God's dear Son***. And if on earth he could confidently say, *Father, I know that thou hearest me always*††, we may then well assure ourselves, that he cannot fail of success, when pleading in the court of heaven; especially when asking those things, which he has purchased for his people by his own blood, and which his heavenly Father, by promise, stands engaged to bestow.

By this intercession "the characters of his servants are vindicated." Observe how the apostle triumphs in the patronage of such an advocate, even under the humblest sense of his own imperfections, and while joyfully ready to renounce every appearance of confidence in himself. *Who*, says he, *shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us*‡‡; though *Satan stand at our right hand to accuse us*§§, though that malignant spirit aggravate every miscarriage, and detract from every service, and add, as in the case of Job‖‖, artifice to rage, and falsehood to malice; Jesus stands at the right hand of God, to vindicate our character from every misrepresentation, and to

* Zech. vi. 13. † John xvii. 24. ‡ Mat. xxviii. 18. § Phil. ii. 9.
‖ Psal. cx. 1. ¶ Rev. i. 18. ** Col. i. 13. †† John xi. 42.
‡‡ Rom. viii. 33, 34. §§ Zech. iii. 1. ‖‖ Job i. and ii.

plead his own righteousness and blood, in answer to those charges which cannot be denied. Again,

The intercession of Christ prevails "for the acceptance of our persons and services." We must indeed humbly own, that we are such sinful creatures, that we pollute whatever we touch; and there is so much sin adhering to the best of our duties, that they need forgiveness, rather than merit reward. But the *Angel before the throne offers the prayers of the saints with much incense**, which gives them a grateful savour; and they are made *Acceptable in the beloved*†.

In a word, this intercession is effectual "to procure for us all necessary blessings;" which Christ in consequence of it, is commissioned to bestow upon us. Thus he now *Keeps us from falling*; and he will ere long *present us before the Father with exceeding joy*‡. The prayer he offered on earth, as the model of that which he is presenting above, shall be completely answered with respect to all his people: *We* shall *be one, in the Father, and in him*; and shall all *be made perfect in one*, being *with him where he is*§. And the eternal happiness of every believer shall shew the value the Father sets on the blood of the Son, and on that intercession which is founded in it.

We have thus taken a brief survey of what the scripture informs us, concerning the intercession of Christ. I am

II. To consider, how this intercession which he ever lives to make, "is a proof of our Lord's being *able to save to the uttermost*."

So you see the apostle affirms; and so it will appear to be, if we consider the foundation, the extent, and the perpetuity of it.

1. The intercession of Christ, "being founded on his atonement, is a proof of the efficacy of that," and consequently of his ability to save.

You have seen it expressly asserted in scripture, that it is *By his own blood* that *he is entered into the most holy place*‖. He pleads with, and upon that, urging before the Father, virtually at least, the merit of his sacrifice on the cross, as the great argument to bestow gospel blessings on those, for whom he hath thus purchased them. So that you evidently see, that were not the atonement of Christ satisfactory, his intercession would be vain. And can you imagine, that God would ever have per-

* Rev. viii. 3. † Eph. i. 6. ‡ Jude 24. § John xvii. 21—24. ‖ Heb. ix. 12.

mitted a person to enter heaven, and to take up his stated residence there under the character of an intercessor, whose plea he has disallowed? It were most absurd to suppose it. The satisfaction of Christ therefore appears to be complete, and consequently his person divine, and therefore his saving power almighty, from his ever living to make intercession. And this the apostle seems plainly to intimate in those memorable words: *Who being the brightness of* the Father's *glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power; having*, in consequence of these divine perfections, *by himself*, that is, by the sacrifice of himself, *purged* or expiated *our sins, sate down at the right hand of the Majesty on high**; which he could never have done under this public character, had his nature been less glorious, and so his atonement less complete.

2. The actual exercise of this intercession, "in such an extent, does farther imply divine perfections," and by consequence a fulness of saving power.

I have before observed, that there is the greatest reason to believe, the intercession of Christ is not merely his appearance before God, in the body in which he suffered; but that it is attended with a constant and ardent intention, that his death may be effectual to the purposes designed, not only for his people in general, but for each of them in particular: And I endeavoured to shew you, that it implied a care, correspondent to their various circumstances, that *grace* might be accommodated to *every time of need.* Now this plainly implies a knowledge extending itself even to omniscience; a knowledge of the hearts, as well as the conditions of his people; a knowledge of those *unutterable breathings*†, in which the most valuable part of prayer consists, and of those secret assaults and strugglings, which are often the most painful scenes through which the christian passes. Yet such a knowledge must the great Intercessor have, not only of one particular person, but of each, and of all the children of God that are scattered abroad in the most distant nations of the earth, and all at the same moment of time. Surely we must say, *Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain unto it*‡: Especially when we consider it, as joined with the administration of that universal kingdom, over which he is exalted. In this view, the humble soul must fall prostrate before him

* Heb. i. 3. † Rom. viii. 26. ‡ Psal. cxxxix. 6.

in the lowliest homage, and cry out, *My Lord, and my God* !* Thou art indeed *able to save to the uttermost:* Nothing "can exceed the penetration of thy wisdom, or the extent of thy power."

3. "The perpetuity of Christ's intercession is a farther argument of his ability always to save."

In this view the apostle introduces the thought, *He is able to save to the uttermost,——seeing he ever liveth to make intercession.* It is an encouragement to our believing application unto him, as the Lord mighty to save, when we consider, that in the prosecution of so amazing an employ, *he fainteth not, neither is weary*†. Had it been the appointment of the Father that he should have retired from the office of an intercessor, after he had attended to it for some few days or years, we must by faith have looked to a past, as the Old Testament saints did to a future transaction: But surely our comfort could not have arisen so high, as it now does, when we reflect, "Even at this moment is Christ appearing in heaven for me: He is there as the refuge of his people *Throughout all generations*‡: And I have all imaginable security of his saving power, because his one offering has so fully completed the work, that he needs not to come down to earth again, by dying to renew the sacrifice that he presented here. No; the efficacy of it is everlasting, as his intercession upon it is perpetual." This seems plainly the apostle's meaning, by what he adds just after the text?—*Such an High-priest became us,—who needeth not, as those high-priests* under the law, *daily to offer;——having done it once for all, when he offered up himself*§.

III. It only remains, that I conclude with a few obvious, but important reflections.

1. How admirable, and how amiable, does the blessed Jesus appear, when considered as the great Intercessor of his people!

How admirable is he in this view! What an honour is done him in the heavenly world! How dear to the Father does he appear to be; when God will not accept the services of the greatest and best of mankind, unless presented by him; and for his sake will graciously regard the meanest and the vilest sinner! And how great does this Intercessor appear in himself? "Blessed Jesus," may the christian say, "Who is like unto

* John xx. 28. † Isa. xl. 28. ‡ Psal. xc. 1. § Heb. vii. 26, 27.

thee? "who canst at once sustain so many different relations, and canst fill them all with their proper offices, of duty to thy Father, and of love to thy people! who canst thus bear, without incumbering thyself, without interfering with each other, the priestly censer, and the royal sceptre! How wise are thy counsels! How extensive thy views? How capacious thy thoughts; and yet at the same time, how compassionate thy gracious heart! That amidst all the exaltations of heaven, all the splendors of thy Father's right hand, thou shouldest still thus graciously remember thine humble followers! That thine eye should be always watchful over them, thine ear be always open to their prayers, thy mouth be ever ready to plead for them, and thine arm to save them! As if it were not love enough to descend and die, unless thou didst for ever live and reign for them, and even glory in being made *Head over all for thy church.*"

"But especially," may the christian say, "when I think of thee, blessed Jesus, not only as the intercessor of thy people in general, but as my intercessor; when I think, that thou hast espoused my character and my cause, vile and obnoxious as it is; and that thou art recommending my poor broken services, which I daily blush to present before thee; and art using thine interest and thine authority in the world above, to complete my salvation, which thou hast begun? What shall thy poor servant say unto thee? All these astonishing and kind regards to me, who am unworthy to wash the feet of the least of thy followers! Shall not the wonders of such condescending grace engage my gratitude to all eternity? My praises now are so exceeding feeble, and so low, I am almost ashamed to offer them: O when shall those noble praises begin, which I hope ere long to offer in that world of perfection, to which thy gracious intercession is bringing me?"

2. With what holy joy may the christian reflect on his interest in such an Intercessor!

Methinks we should be often entering into this pleasurable thought. The Lord Jesus is pleading for us above, and *he ever lives to make intercession* there. We had pious friends, who were once bearing us on their hearts before God in prayer; but they are now sleeping in the dust: Our dear religious parents, our holy ministers, our guides and companions in the ways of God! We have no warrant to expect any farther assistance

from their prayers. In this sense, *Abraham is ignorant of us, and Israel does not*, and cannot, *acknowledge us**: But Christ is an ever-living Intercessor, without whose interposition theirs had been vain, and in comparison with whom we have none on earth, or in heaven to desire. Let papists commit themselves to the patronage of angels and saints, and by a voluntary and offensive humility, intreat them to intercede with God, or to intercede with Christ, in their favour: As *Christ has by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified*†; so by one continued intercession, in which he needs and admits no associate, he for ever secures them.

3. With what holy boldness may the christian draw near to God, in dependance on such an Intercessor!

We have daily important errands to the throne of grace; and perhaps hardly any thing would more promote the success of them, than to lift up a cheerful and believing eye, as expecting to receive something from God's hand‡. A consciousness of our own numberless imperfections and defects, may indeed discourage us; a sense of our guilt might even fright us away. But when we see Jesus *standing before the throne*, in such a posture, in such a character, surely we may venture near; and when most awed, and most dismayed, may encourage ourselves in him. This is an inference which the apostle draws, and which he repeats again and again: *Seeing we have a great High-priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God; let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need*§; for surely, neither mercy to pardon, nor grace to strengthen, will now be with-held. *Having therefore boldness*, (as he elsewhere expresses it) *to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by that new and living way which he hath consecrated for us,—let us draw near:* And Oh that we might ever do it *with a true heart*, since there so is blessed a foundation laid for a *full assurance of faith*‖!

4. What reason is there to adore the divine wisdom and goodness, in appointing so excellent a way, at once, to promote our humility, and our confidence!

You have seen, how justly it may establish our faith, to

* Isa. lxiii. 16. † Heb. x. 14. ‡ Acts iii. 5.
§ Heb. iv. 14, 16. ‖ Heb. x. 19—22.

consider, that though we are unworthy for whom any thing should be done, yet Christ is worthy: And I may add, that in appointing him to be our Intercessor, God hath declared his own favourable regard to us, and we may comfortably conclude, that *The Father himself loveth us**. Yet this love is manifested, as in a very gracious, so also in a very humbling way. This token of divine displeasure against sin is yet upon us, that we are not allowed to draw near to him in our own name, or to expect the least favour for our own sake; but he still keeps us at an humble distance, nor will he permit us to see his face, unless our elder brother be with us†: And as he treated Eliphaz and his companions, saying, *My wrath is kindled against you; take now an offering, and go to my servant Job, and he shall pray for you, and him will I accept; lest I deal with you after your folly*‡: Thus God refuses to look on the best of our offerings, if they do not pass through another more acceptable hand. How awful a reflection, and how wise a provision, to promote that humility, which so well becomes pardoned rebels, before the only injured Majesty of heaven! This is, as he expresses it by Ezekiel§, *That we may remember* our way, *and be confounded, and never open our mouths any more, because of our shame, even when he is pacified towards us for all that we have done.*

Lastly, How powerfully should this comfortable doctrine operate on our minds, to promote our love to this great Intercessor, and our zeal for his honour and glory!

"Blessed Lord," should each of us say, "dost thou remember such a worthless worm amidst all thine honour and joy above, and shall not I remember thee, *the King of glory?* Where should my heart be but with thee? On what should I *Set* my *affections*, but *on those things which are above, where* thou *sittest at the right-hand of God*‖? My righteousness, and my strength, mine advocate, and my guardian! Shall I be unmindful of thee? While thou art pleading my cause in heaven, shall I not be joyfully willing to plead thy sacred and honourable cause on earth? Rather, much rather, may I forget the powers of reason, and lose the faculty of speech, than neglect to use them for thee: Rather may my *Tongue cleave*

* John xvi. 27. † Gen. xliii. 5. ‡ Job xlii. 7, 8.
§ Ezek. xvi. 63. ‖ Col. iii. 1, 2.

*to the roof of my mouth**, than it should be ashamed, or afraid, to vindicate thy gospel, though I stood alone in a croud of insulting blaspheming enemies, and though they added cruelty and terror to their impieties. So mayest thou *Confess me before thy Father and the holy angels*, in the last solemn day, as I determine that I will *confess thee* now†, though this *crooked and perverse generation* should grow still more degenerate than it is."

Christians, if we have not such sentiments and resolutions as these, I fear we have no title to any of the comforts of Christ's intercession, and shall have no share in its invaluable blessings.

* Psal. cxxxvii. 5, 6. † Mat. x. 32. Luke xii. 8.

SERMON IV.

POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST.

Coming to God by Christ, the Character of those that shall be saved.

Heb. vii. 25.—*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make Intercession for them.*

WHEN the Psalmist had been celebrating the Majesty of God, as the almighty creator and possessor of all, he breaks out into this most natural, and important enquiry, *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place*?* And methinks, christians, when we have been hearing of the boundless power of Christ to save, and of the prevalency of that intercession which he ever lives to make, we should immediately cry out, "Who are the happy souls, in whose rescue this almighty arm shall be employed, and whose cause this gracious intercessor will undertake always to plead?" The text answers the question in a very edifying and satisfactory manner, though in few words; They are such as *come unto God by him.*

You know that from this scripture I have already considered,

I. What we are to understand by Christ's being *able to save to the uttermost.*

II. What evidences we have, that he is really so.

III. I have considered the particular argument for it, which the apostle here draws, from his *ever living to make intercession.*

It only remains, that I now open,

IV. The character of the persons, who are encouraged to expect a share in this salvation; they are such as *come unto God by him.*

Now before I proceed to the more particular discussion of

* Psal. xxiv. 3.

these words, you must give me leave to observe, that they seem in their primary and strictest sense to signify "an approach to God in the solemnities of religious worship, in the name of Christ, as the great intercessor."

As when the Jewish people were honoured with the abode of the Shekinah, the visible token of the divine presence, they did in their highest religious solemnities approach to that, surrounding with their sacrifices, and their prayers, the tabernacle or temple, where it held its residence; hence it seems to have come to pass, that the phrases of *coming to God, coming into his presence*, and *drawing near to him*, were often used to express the acts of divine worship*. And as the priests were admitted to come nearer to the ark, on which this visible glory usually rested, than others even of that *holy nation;* they are with peculiar propriety spoken of, as *drawing near to God*†. We may also add, that forasmuch as once a year the high-priest went into the holy of holies, in the name of the whole congregation, with the blood of victims offered to expiate their sins; they might properly, at that solemn season, be said to come unto God by him. And the connection of these words, as I have largely shewn, does most evidently imply an allusion to these Jewish rites, and a regard to Christ as the great *High-priest of our profession.*

But it would be very imprudent, and unsafe, to leave the matter thus generally explained. Salvation is here promised, to all that *come unto God by Christ;* as it elsewhere is, to all that *call on the name of the Lord*‡. Yet most certain it is, from the whole tenor of scripture, that there are multitudes who call on his name, and transmit their petitions to God in a professed dependance on his mediation and intercession, whose persons and services God will reject with abhorrence; who shall see salvation only from afar, and never be permitted to taste of it. And therefore it is manifest, that, to make the scripture consistent with itself, these phrases, when connected in such a manner, must be taken in a much larger extent, as comprehending all that, by which the acceptable worshipper, and the true believer, is distinguished from the hypocritical professor who draws near to God only to dishonour him, and to bring on himself aggravated guilt and condemnation.

And by consequence, coming to God, as the phrase is here

* Numb. viii. 19. Psal. lxv. 2. lxxiii. 28. xcv. 2. c. 2. Isa. xxix. 13. lviii. 2. Heb. vii. 19. † Exod. xix. 22. Lev. x. 3. Numb. xvi. 5. Ezek. xl. 46. xliv. 13. ‡ Joel ii. 32. Acts ii. 21. Rom. x. 13.

used, must signify in the general, "applying ourselves with the greatest seriousness to our important business with him;" as such expressions often signify, when they are put for the whole of religion*: And *coming through Christ* must imply "such humble and faithful regards to him as the great Mediator, such a cordial acceptance of him, such a cheerful dependance upon him," as is so often in the New Testament expressed by that faith in him, to which the promises of eternal salvation are made, and to which they are limited.

But since it is a matter of so great moment, and a matter in which it is to be feared so many are deceiving their own souls, give me leave to descend into some particulars of explication. And let me intreat your diligent attention, and beseech you, as you dread the ruin of the *Hypocrites in Zion*, that you enter seriously into your own hearts, and *Judge yourselves*, as persons that expect shortly to be *judged of the Lord*†. Oh that through the sanctifying, the quickening, and the witnessing influences of the holy Spirit, we might see the characters which are now to be drawn, more and more evidently agreeing to ourselves!

The believer you see is here described,——as *coming to God*,——and as coming to him *through Christ*.

I. The believer is described, as one that comes to God."

This evidently implies,——a firm persuasion of his being and attributes,——a deep conviction that it is our highest interest to secure his favour,——a readiness to renounce whatever can come in competition with it,——a cheerful and resolute subjection to his service,——and a care to keep up a continual correspondence with him, and to live as in a state of nearness to him.

1. Coming to God evidently implies, "a firm belief of his being and perfections."

This the apostle asserts in express words, which carry their own evidence along with them: *He that cometh unto God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*‡. And indeed the latter is as necessary as the former; for merely to believe a first cause of almighty power and consummate skill, as some pretend to do, without any sense of his providence, government and goodness, is, with regard to all the purposes of practical religion, as vain and as pernicious as atheism itself.

* Psal. lxv. 4. Jer. xxx. 21, 22. Jam. iv. 8. † 1 Cor. xi. 31. ‡ Heb. xi. 6.

But you will remember, that a good man does not rest in such a cold assent to the truth of those doctrines, like that he gives to propositions which he studies only for amusement. No, but they descend into the mind with a due energy, and he realizeth them to himself with the utmost seriousness. "Oh my soul," does he often say, "it is not a precarious conclusion, or a mere probable hypothesis, that there is a God, and such a God as I profess to believe; but it is a certain and evident truth. I do not more clearly see the meridian sun by his own rays, nor more surely know, that I myself think, and exist; than I see God by his works, and know him as the original author of my being, and of these thinking powers which are now enquiring after him. There is, there is, an eternal and immutable Jehovah. He reigns on an exalted throne above, and the highest potentate of that shining world was infinitely more inferior to him, than superior to the meanest insect on earth. God is there, and he is here; he surrounds all his creatures with his immensity, and preserves them all by his influence. *In him I live, and move, and have my being**; on him angels and worms are equally dependant; nor is there a motion in the material, or a thought in the intellectual world, to which he is not most intimately conscious. Behold him, Oh my soul, with reverence and love; for he is a most awful Being, in whom unsearchable wisdom, and almighty power, are joined with unerring justice, unspotted holiness, and invariable truth; but remember he is also the most amiable. There is a beauty in all these perfections; and it is softened and sweetened by the overflowings of goodness and mercy; those rich and gentle streams, which not only water paradise, but visit these regions of guilt and darkness."

Such views as these are familiar to the mind of the believer: And this firm and affectionate persuasion of the being and attributes of God, is the foundation, both of natural and of revealed religion; and the root, from whence all the branches of moral virtue, and evangelical faith and holiness, must spring.

2. Coming to God must also imply, "an earnest desire of a share in the divine favour, as our highest interest and happiness."

And methinks, this is a necessary consequence of the former. We are indeed too apt *To lift up our soul unto vanity*†, and to grow fond of these empty shadows: But it is because God is forgotten; as we admire the stars, because the sun is absent.

* Acts xvii. 28. † Psal. xxiv. 4.

But surely, when the mind is thus possessed with a sense of God, it will feel a kind of indignation, that any other object should have ever been compared with him, though it were only to be postponed, as inconceivably less valuable. Much more will it be displeased, and ashamed to think, that it has ever preferred these to God. "Alas," will such a soul say, "whither have I wandered? Into what a wilderness am I come? I look round about me on the creatures, and I see no shelter nor refreshment. They are like *Broken cisterns, or deceitful brooks** whose waters fail me, when I need them most. *What* then, *O Lord, do I wait for? my hope is in thee* †; for thou art *The fountain of living waters*‡: All sufficient for my happiness, and only sufficient for it. If I were a poor abandoned outcast, if I had not a friend or helper on earth; if I knew not where I should look for my next lodging, or my next meal; if, at the same time, my body were worn out with pining illness, and every member of it the seat of pain; yet if I could but look up, and see thy face through this cloud, if I could but call thee my Father and my God, I were happy still; and might pity the most prosperous monarch on earth, that was a stranger to thee, and thy love. *There are many that say, who will shew us any good?* Oh that thy Spirit may teach them true wisdom! But as for me, I will say, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee*§." In consequence of this,

3. Coming to God implies, "a readiness to forsake every thing which can stand in opposition to him."

My brethren, what I have been describing, is, in a good man, not merely a conviction of the understanding, but a sentiment of the heart. He would abhor the hypocrisy, the impiety, and the folly, of owning the incomparable excellence of the divine Being, and yet practically chusing something else before him. "Lord," does he sometimes say, "I have often done it; and for ever blessed be thy name, that thou didst not finally *chuse* those *my delusions*‖. It grieves me to think, how I injured thee, and dishonoured and wronged my own soul, when *Other Lords had dominion over me:* And they would detain me in their ignoble servitude; but in answer to all their unreasonable claims, *I make mention of thy name*¶. Thou requirest, that I should *give thee my* very *heart***, and should be

* Job vi. 15. † Psal. xxxix. 7. ‡ Jer. ii. 13. § Psal. iv. 6. lxxiii. 25.
‖ Isa. lxvi. 4. ¶ Isa. xxvi. 13. ** Prov. xxiii. 26.

ready *to leave all and follow thee* *; Lord, I would cheerfully consent, and hope that through grace I can say, *None of these things move me, neither* should I, in such a cause, *count my life dear unto me*†."

4. Coming to God does farther import, a willing subjection to his service."

"Lord," does the christian say, "I would come to thee, not to sit down under thy shadow, indolent and unactive. My faculties were made for employment; and it is my joy to think, that they shall be employed for thee. I love thee *With all my heart, and with all my soul;* and therefore, by the aids of thy grace, I will serve thee *with all my might, and with all my strength*‡. I would gladly *yield myself to thee, as alive from the dead, and* use *my members as instruments of righteousness*§. Thy promises are my delight, as I trust they are my portion; but, Lord, they are not the only part of thy word that I love; for I *Delight myself in thy statutes*, and *love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold*‖. I account thy service, mine honour, and my happiness; I desire always to keep the eye of my soul directed towards thee, to wait the intimations of thy gracious pleasure; and if I am distinguished from others by any advantages of nature, or of circumstances, I would chiefly rejoice in them, as they are capable of being improved for thee."

5. Coming unto God does also imply, "the keeping up a constant correspondence with him."

I before observed, that this phrase, in the present connexion, seems particularly to refer to our approaching him in the solemnities of religious worship: And when it is spoken of as a part of the christian's character, it plainly intimates a frequent and constant care in these duties. Thus good men under the old law are described, as a *Generation of them that seek God*¶, "Lord," does every child of God often think and say, "*It is* indeed *good for me to draw near unto thee***. What is my great final hope, but to dwell in a state of everlasting nearness? In the mean time, the nearer I am to thee, the more of heaven is brought down to earth; the more I enjoy of thee, the more do I enjoy myself, and relish my being. I make my visits to thy throne, not merely to pay an homage which thou requirest, but to seek an entertainment which I prefer to any

* Luke xviii. 28. † Acts xx. 24. ‡ Luke x. 27. § Rom. vi. 13.
‖ Psal cxix. 16—127. ¶ Psal. xxiv. 6. ** Psal. lxxiii. 28.

other. Far from looking upon it as a disagreeable condition, with which my expectations from thee are clogged, I count the opportunities of such converse, and my inclinations towards it, in the number of my greatest obligations to thy goodness." Should God say to the christian, "I will for the future dispense with thine attendance; thou shalt retain thine interest in me, though thou shouldest call upon me no more; and shall meet me as thy friend at death, though thou forgettest me in life;" the good man would not be able to bear such a dismission. He would rather say, "Lord, if I were to live only on these terms, it were much *better for me to die.* I should with Moses, in another case, *Pray thee to kill me out of hand**, rather than leave me here under such a burden as life would seem, if it might not be sweetened by communion with thee, in the closet, in the family, and in public ordinances."

These, my brethren, are important parts of the christian's character, yet they are far from being the whole of it. With this temper he comes to God; but how should he be encouraged to such an approach, if the great Redeemer were forgot? We add therefore,

II. That all, to whom salvation is promised in the gospel, "make their approach to God *through Christ*," or, as the text expresses it, they *come unto God by him.*

You will no doubt be willing, that I should open this important article pretty largely; and I shall do it under the following particulars. Coming to God by Christ implies,—a deep sense of our need of a Mediator, in order to our comfortable intercourse with God;—a persuasion of the power of Christ,—and a confidence in his grace;—a cordial approbation of the method in which he bestows salvation;—and a constant care to maintain proper regards to Christ, in the whole course of our walking with God. This is that evangelical faith, to which the promises of gospel salvation are appropriated, by the text before us, and the whole tenour of scripture.

1. Coming to God by Christ implies, "a deep sense of our need of a Mediator, in order to a comfortable intercourse with God."

Christianity is the religion of sinners; and it will never be really welcome to a soul, that is not sensible of the evil, and

* Numb. xi. 15.

malignity of sin. The natural pride of our hearts would first lead us to forget God, and not to seek after him at all: But if conscience be in any measure awakened to see, what it is strange every rational creature should not always see, our dependance on him, and our need of an interest in his favour, pride finds a second refuge, in a fond conceit of bringing something of our own to recommend us to it. And if at length men are sensible, they have nothing of this kind, which they can call their own, they are ready to think of casting themselves immediately on the mercies of an offended God, rather than of multiplying their obligations, and their dependance, by coming to him through a Mediator. If we must own ourselves sinners, we are prone to extenuate our guilt; and if we cannot look upon it as indifferent, would at least represent it, as an excusable thing, which is worthy of compassion, rather than of indignation. How difficult is it to view it in a true light! To see what insolence and baseness it carries in it, and what danger and ruin it exposes us to! But divine grace makes way for the gospel into our hearts, by displaying the justice and the holiness of God, as equally essential to his nature, with his wisdom and goodness: And then, when we consider ourselves as appearing in his presence, convicted of ten thousand aggravated offences, we cry out from a deep and inward sense, "*Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God* ! Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God† ?* Surely I need some perfectly righteous Mediator, high in his favour, to introduce me to him, and to render my access safe and comfortable, by appearing as a *Days-man betwixt us, to lay his hand upon us both‡*."

2. Coming to God by Christ farther implies, "a full persuasion of his saving power."

We have been endeavouring to prove it at large; and the conviction of it enters deep into the believing soul. He assents to this most concerning truth with full satisfaction, though there be something in the foundation of it which feeble reason cannot fully comprehend. Important as he sees his everlasting concerns to be, he can courageously venture them here; he can cry out, *Lord, I believe*, though a mixture of unbelief may cost him many a tear§. "Lord," does he often say, "I am sure, that *If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*‖. Though jew and gentile may reject thee, I humbly own thee, as the

* 1 Sam. vi. 20. † Micah vi. 6. ‡ Job ix. 33. § Mark ix. 24. ‖ Matt. viii. 2.

Head stone of the corner. Oh! that I were but as sure of an interest in thee, as I might be of finding my security and my happiness in it!"

3. It farther implies, "Cheerful confidence in the "Grace of Christ," as well as a persuasion of his saving power.

Without this, he would appear the object of terror, rather than of hope; or in the mildest view, but as *a spring shut up*, and *a fountain sealed*, to a traveller languishing, and dying with thirst: But faith teaches the christian firmly to rely on that kind and gracious invitation, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink**. "Yes," says the believer, "it is indeed so. The compassions of his heart are proportionable to the power of his hand; and I will cast my soul upon them. Blessed Jesus, I would throw myself at thy feet, though it were a supposeable case that I might perish there, and but an uncertain peradventure, that thou mightest pity and save me; for if thou shouldest not, I could but die; and I had rather die an humble penitent, than an obstinate rebel: But forgive that unworthy thought,—that thou shouldest leave an humble penitent to die before thee! Neither thy grace, nor thy truth, will permit it. *Him that cometh to thee, thou wilt in no wise cast out*†: And though I am a poor, weak, worthless creature, thou camest *Not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*‡; and thou callest them in so compassionate a manner, as to engage that thou wilt *Not break the bruised reed, nor quench* even *the smoaking flax*§. Let Christ be true, whoever is a liar." Thus do his doubts gradually disperse; thus does he rise to a joy and peace in believing. But it is always to be remembered,

4. That coming to God by Christ includes, "a cordial approbation, and acceptance of the methods of his saving grace."

This is of the highest importance, if we would not deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin. Men may dress up an idol in their own minds, and call it by the name of Christ; and they may be as fond of it, as pagans are of the works of their own hands: But can this save them, if it be found that the true Christ, as exhibited in the gospel, has been overlooked and rejected by them? A true believer impartially enquires after the way in which salvation is proposed in the word of God; and when he has discovered it, he entirely approves it, as *a faithful saying*,

* John vii. 37. † John vi. 37. ‡ Mat. ix. 13. § Mat. xii. 20.

worthy of God to appoint, and most fit for him to accept. More particularly he views it, and acquiesces in it, as the way of faith, and the way of holiness. Each of these views of it will deserve our farther attention.

The good man heartily desires to receive the gospel-salvation, in "the way of faith, or humble believing."

It is thus the word of God always exhibits it: *The just shall live by faith** ; nor *Shall any flesh glory in his presence*†. And so entirely is every high thought reduced to the obedience of this blessed principle, in the heart of him that comes to God by Christ, that he is willing to do, what, to so corrupt a nature, as ours, seems most expensive, to *Buy wine and milk without money and without price*‡ ; willing to part with the very dearest of his idols, to renounce all dependance on himself, as to what is past, or what is yet to come ; to trust no more in his own righteousness, or his own strength ; and to say with the most joyful consent of soul, *In the Lord have I* both *righteousness and strength*§. "Blessed Jesus, it is hard to my proud heart "to say it ; but it is therefore so much the more reasonable and necessary : For this cursed dependance on self has spoiled the best of my duties, and would betray me to guilt and ruin in many future instances, shouldest thou forsake me. How imperfect and sinful are my best days, and my holiest hours! How feeble and ineffectual my most vigorous and solemn resolutions, against so much inward corruption, and so many outward enemies and temptations! *Lord, I am distressed*, but I hope, thou hast *undertaken for me*‖. I hope, I may look on thee as my great surety and covenant-head, who didst, before the foundation of the world, engage to satisfy for my breaches of thy Father's law, to work out for me a perfect righteousness, and by thy always victorious power and grace, to conduct me to glory in the midst of all opposition. *Eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord*¶ ; from his hand would I most thankfully receive this crown, and at his feet would I humbly lay it!" On the other hand,

It is to be remembered, That as Christ saves his people, "in the way of holiness," the true believer most cordially falls in with this part of the scheme.

Indeed he could not otherwise be a believer in the gospel

* Rom. i. 17. † 1 Cor. i. 29. ‡ Isa. lv. 1. § Isa. xlv. 24.
‖ Isa. xxxviii. 14. ¶ Rom. vi. 23.

sense of the word; for saving faith is a principle of holy obedience; and a *Faith without works* is expressly declared to be *dead, as the body is dead* when *without the spirit**. The christian well knows, that it was the great design of his Lord's appearance and sufferings in the flesh, that he *Might bring us to God*†, that he might *Save his people from their sins*‡, *and purify them to himself, as a peculiar people, zealous of good works*§. And how reasonable is this part of the scheme! "Could I," says he, "have desired, that it should have been otherwise! that the holy Jesus should have been the minister of sin? that he, whose great business it was to honour the law of God, should have dissolved our obligations to it, and have given a licence to his followers to continue the *Servants of corruption*‖, even while they call him their Lord? Or could I ask it, or even so much as wish it, that he should distinguish me from others, by a dispensation of that kind? Unreasonable and detestable thought! Lord, I desire not, I understand not a salvation, of which holiness shall not be an essential part. And though I well know, that many precepts of thy gospel are sublime, and difficult; and that they may be justly represented, by *Cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye*¶; yet through thy grace I can say, *I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way***. Blessed Jesus, thou art more welcome to my soul, as *Made of God unto me, sanctification*, as well as *Righteousness and redemption*††. Give me thy spirit to lead me, and I will follow with pleasure; *draw me, and I will run after thee* in the way which thou thyself hast traced; for *thou* who *knowest all things*, knowest that it is the desire of my soul, to be conformed to thee in holiness now, as well as in glory hereafter." I shall only add,

5. Coming to God by Christ does farther express, "a continual care to maintain a proper regard to him, in the whole course of our walking with God."

He is not considered, only as a Mediator to introduce us at first into the divine presence, and so to settle a correspondence, to be carried on afterwards without any farther use of him; but as that blessed and important person, *Through whom we have* continually *access by one spirit unto the Father*‡‡. "Lord," does the christian often say, not merely as a language learned

* Jam. ii. 26.
† 1 Pet. iii. 18.
‡ Mat. i. 21.
§ Tit. ii. 14.
‖ 2 Pet. ii. 19.
¶ Mat. v. 29, 30.
** Psal. cxix. 128.
†† 1 Cor. i. 30.
‡‡ Ephes. ii. 18.

from others, but as expressive of what he feels in his own soul, "thou art indeed my life. How should the branches grow, but by sap derived from the root? How should the members act, but by influences communicated from the head? Teach me by thy grace to say with thine holy apostle, *I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me**. And may I ever be found in the number of those, who, regarding thee, as the living stone, are by union with thee, *As lively stones, builded up together for an habitation of God through the spirit*†! Thus let me pass through *The wilderness* of life, *leaning on thee as the beloved* of my soul‡; and when I have finished my pilgrimage, may I lay down my weary head, in thy gentle faithful bosom, dying as I have lived, in the exercise of faith, and commending *My spirit into thine hands!*"—— This is the character of those who come unto God by Christ; and in these respects may they say, with the beloved disciple, *Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*§.

I shall not enter on a laboured argument to prove that these particulars are comprehended in the words which the text uses, to describe those who are interested in the gospel salvation. It is a formality, which may well be spared, to those who consider the natural import of the phrase, and the general tenor of the word of God; and the scriptures which I have introduced under each head, will easily furnish out matter of proof, to those who are capable of judging of a more abstruse kind of argument than I here think it proper to enter upon.

I should rather chuse to dilate on the practical improvements, which might naturally arise from this branch of my discourse; and address myself to you in such exhortations as these: ——Let us adore the divine goodness, that such a salvation is offered to us, in so reasonable, so easy, and so gracious a way:—— Let us examine by the hints which have now been proposed, whether we are in the number of those who are interested in it:——Let those who are convinced that they are not, be persuaded seriously to reflect on their present circumstances:——Let those who are alarmed with a sense of their present danger, be persuaded, in the strength of divine grace, to come unto God through Christ:——Let those who are sincerely desirous to do it, be encouraged to pursue so wise and necessary a purpose: And let those who have been enabled to comply with the ex-

* Gal. ii. 20. † 1 Pet. ii. 4, 6. Eph. ii. 22. ‡ Cant. viii. 5. § 1 John. i. 3.

hortation, be excited to peculiar thankfulness, and established in a cheerful hope of that salvation, which they are taught to expect. But that I may not be under a necessity of dispatching these important heads in a few hasty words, or of swelling this discourse to an immoderate bulk, I chuse to refer them to another opportunity, when I shall conclude what I have to offer from the text; nor would it have employed us so long, had it not contained a variety of very weighty and instructive matter. In the mean time, may the hints I have now been giving you, be so recollected and considered, as to prepare your hearts for what is farther to be spoken!

SERMON V.

POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST.

An Exhortation to Sinners to come unto God by Christ.

Heb. vii. 25.—*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make Intercession for them.*

AT length, my friends, I am entering on the last discourse, which I intend from these words. Our meditations upon them had been drawn to a close much sooner, had not many funeral discourses interrupted them; and you know, there were also others of that kind, which did not interrupt them, being preached on week-days. But it is surely most fit, that those awful providences, which for a while diverted our thoughts from this subject, should now awaken our more diligent and lively attention to it. It is not for mortal creatures to trifle with these important truths of christianity, on which the life of their souls does so evidently depend: No, nor to rest in speculative views of them, while heart-application is neglected. The dying, and the dead, look upon these things in another manner; and we shall shortly be numbered amongst them: The Lord awaken us now so to *hear the conclusion of the whole matter*, as we shall then wish we had heard it! I have already endeavoured,

I. To shew you, what we are to understand by Christ's being *able to save to the uttermost.*

II. To prove that he is so.

III. To open the doctrine of his intercession, and to consider what an argument it is of his saving power. And then,

IV. I have considered the character of those, who shall be interested in this salvation, as described in the text by their coming to God by him.

Under each of the three former heads I have given you several reflections; and I am now to conclude with others which more immediately arise from the fourth, especially when taken

in connection with the foregoing. May each of you know your own concern in them; and may the blessed Spirit of God apply them to your souls with divine efficacy and success! *suffer*, beseech you, this *word of exhortation* to address you in these six particulars.

1. "Let us adore the divine goodness that such a salvation is offered us, in so reasonable, so easy, and so gracious a way."

Such a salvation in any method might have been joyfully welcome to us; and how much more in this! Let us call in our roving thoughts, and settle them for a while in this one point. Let us *stand still and see this salvation of God.* Sure when we consider our natural condition, in the view in which the gospel represents it; when we hear the law of God thundering out its curses against us; when we see his justice lifting up its sword to smite us, hell gaping to devour us, and its malicious fiends eying us as their surer prey, and impatient to begin our torment; in such a view it must have appeared a great favour, had God heard the cry of our anguish and despair, so far as to permit *the rocks to fall upon us, and the mountains to cover us*, though they had crushed us into atoms, and he had, at the same time, extinguished the thinking part of our nature and reduced it to its original nothing: O how gladly would millions, that were once the rich, the great, the learned, the victorious of the earth, meet such a fate as this; and perhaps be more thankful for the destruction of their beings, than they ever were for any of its enjoyments? But we hear of being *saved.*——of being saved *to the uttermost*;—hear of it, not merely as a favour conferred on others, but as an offer proposed to us; as a scheme, not merely deliberated upon, or intended, but in a great measure already effected; and our eyes are directed to the regions of complete and eternal glory, as an abode purchased and prepared for such worthless and guilty creatures as we. "Blessed God! did our appointed way to it lie, not only through a wilderness of thorns, but through a sea of fire, how gladly might we accept the proposals? If the scheme had been to raise us to this heavenly paradise, after the severest course of penance on earth; or even after we had tasted of the cup of thy wrath in hell, and suffered all but the despair of those doleful regions, for a long succession of years, or of ages: Surely we must then have received the news of such a distant deliverance on our knees, and have mingled thy praises with those groans and tears,

which such intermediate discipline had extorted from us. And dost thou now offer us a complete pardon, in so easy a way, as only to say to us, *wash and be clean*, as only to call us to come unto thee by Christ?"——Surely, christians, instead of complaining of this as a hardship, we have reason to own it as a great additional favour.——Whither indeed should we go, but unto God? And where should we dwell safe and happy, but *under the shadow of his wings?* And how could we have presumed, or indeed how could we have borne, to have come to him, otherwise than by Christ?——It is true indeed, that if we would enter into a treaty with this *Prince of Peace*, we must give up our sins: But what are these, but the tyrants of the mind, whose reign is our servitude, whose death is our deliverance!——And what though we must give up our own righteousness too, as to any dependance upon it for our justification before God; is there a soul among us, that would dare to stand, or fall according to the perfection of that? And is there an experienced christian, that does not know that there is a secret unutterable pleasure in *submitting to the righteousness of God**; and a wise and rational transport of soul, in receiving the rich grace given us in Christ, to make us *complete in him*†; far beyond the vain joy of that distempered dream which represented us to our own imagination, as rich and honourable, righteous and happy, in the midst of poverty and shame, guilt and misery? Surely *If we should hold our peace*, when such a salvation is proposed to us in such a method as this, it might almost be expected that *the very stones would cry out*, to upbraid our ingratitude‡.

2. Let us seriously examine, whether we have "come to God by Christ, and so are interested in this great salvation."

To each of *you*, my friends, that hear me this day, *is the word of this salvation sent*§; and that you have received the offers of it, will, on the whole, be matter of everlasting joy, or of everlasting sorrow. The word of God assures us, that there are comparatively few, that receive saving benefit by it, *Many are called, but few are chosen*‖. And does it not alarm you? Methinks, if there were only a few out of a considerable number, that missed it, each should be ready to tremble for himself: If we knew but one soul in all this assembly should finally lose it, we might each of us cry out with great solicitude of spirit, if in any degree unassured with regard to ourselves,

* Rom. x. 3. † Col. ii. 10. ‡ Luke xix. 40.
§ Acts xiii. 26. ‖ Mat. xx. 16.

*Lord is it I**? And how much more now?——Are there any of you that must say, "I do not certainly know, whether this salvation will be mine or not?" How can you bear the uncertainty? Let me charge it on your consciences that you enter into the enquiry. Have you come unto God by Christ?——I ask not so much, Whether you believe the existence of God, and the truth of christianity? This is a faith, which you may carry down with you to the habitation of *Devils*, who themselves *also believe and tremble*†?——I ask not so much, whether you have ever felt some desires after an interest in God through Christ? In this respect, as well as in others, there is a *Desire of the slothful that kills him*‡, while it serves only to increase his present disquietude and his after punishment.——But I ask, what is on the whole your choice? What are your cares, your hopes, and your joys? Do they centre in God? Do they arise from communion with him through Christ? Do you experimentally know, what it is to come to his throne, to submit your revolted souls to his government with delight? To wait the signal of his will, as the rule of your actions; to enjoy, or at least earnestly desire, the visits of his grace, the effusions of his love on your hearts? Is prayer your pleasure, or is it your burden? Do you regard the word of God as an invaluable treasury, or is it to you as a sealed book? You have a thousand traces of the sublimest devotion and piety there: Can you relish them? Can you find any considerable resemblance between yourselves, and those holy souls, whose characters are there recorded and approved? You call yourselves christians: But do you know Christ, and do you love him, and do you cordially approve of the methods of his saving grace? Do you know what it is, to come and lay down your guilty souls, as under the effusions of his blood; to strip yourselves of all the pride of nature, that your nakedness may be clothed with his glorious righteousness? To bow to his sceptre as his obedient subjects, and rejoice that you have such a Governor? And do you feel the necessity of a daily application to him, as your great covenant-head, on whose influence you live, and by whose spirit you must perpetually be actuated, to the purposes of a divine life?——These, these are the decisive questions; and let me intreat you to hear what conscience has to reply to them.

And permit me once more to ask you, if you are yet uncertain, as to this important article, how it is that this uncer-

* Mat. xxvi. 22. † James ii. 19. ‡ Prov. xxi. 25.

tainty sits on your minds? Are you easy under it? Do you carelessly defer the enquiry from one day to another; or purposely decline it, because you are afraid of some consequences which may disturb you? Or do you renew your examinations again and again, searching for those scriptures, and waiting for those parts of our public discourses, which may pierce deepest, and try your souls to the utmost; still above all begging, that God would search them; and renewing your humble entreaties, that you may know the very worst of your state, and be at length brought unto him through Christ, though it were by the most painful way, that any of his servants have ever trod?

As to some of you, perhaps, the case may require discussion: But I believe there are others, to whom it would be no long labour. I fear, even while I am yet speaking, conscience must witness against some of you, that you are utter strangers to such a temper, and that you never *came unto God by Christ*. And therefore,

3. "Let those who are conscious to themselves, that they have never *come unto God by Christ*, be engaged seriously to reflect on the danger of their present condition."

I know, the corruption of our hearts strongly inclines us, to think as favourably as possible of ourselves, and eagerly to grasp the feeblest reed, which may give some present, though most precarious, support to our hope: And I know, Satan would favour the delusion to the utmost, because he is aware, there is but a short time in which he need labour to do it; so that if he can amuse you a few days, you are his prey for ever. It is our business, as ministers of the gospel, to counter-work these deceivers. O that God would teach us to do it effectually! "Sinner, thou art convinced in thy conscience, that thou art a stranger to the temper and character described; that *Thou art the man* who hast sat, perhaps many years, under the sound of the gospel, and to this very day hast never come unto God by Christ. And dost thou hope for salvation by him, while this is the case? It is a most arrogant and pernicious hope. I solemnly declare unto thee this day, *Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter**. Dost thou hope? On what foundation is it? Shew me one promise in the whole book of God, that speaks pardon and peace to an impenitent unbelieving sinner. Wilt thou say, Christ *is able to save to the uttermost?* He is indeed so; and yet it is no contradiction to declare, that as things now

* Acts viii. 21.

stand, he cannot save thee: For he *cannot deny himself;* he cannot overthrow the whole tenor of his gospel, and make himself *The minister of sin**. You know, he has expressly said, *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins*†; nay, *He that believeth not shall be damned*‡. You know he has foretold, that he will another day publicly say, *As for those mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me*§: And that so much more dreadful condemnation awaits them, than fell on the transgressors of Moses's law, though they *Died without mercy*‖, that *It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for such*¶. And will your hopes still stand, while all this dreadful artillery is planted directly against them? *Shall the earth be forsaken for thee, and the rock be removed out of its place***? Rocks should much sooner be removed, and all the earth left desolate, than the whole constitution of the gospel shall be overthrown, lest thou shouldst perish. You would not take poison, in hope that God should work a miracle to preserve your life. Yet you might more reasonably expect this, than the other; because it would not so directly contradict any of the perfections of God, or any of his declarations. The matter is brought to a very short issue; and it requires no penetration, or labour of thought, to see it. If the gospel be not true, there is no foundation for expecting this salvation at all; but if it be, you are cut off from any hope of it, while you continue thus; and you are, even whilst I speak, on the very borders of hell.

And now, disarmed as you are of all these unavailing hopes, sit down and enter deeply into your present circumstances. "The Son of God became incarnate, and lived and died to procure salvation for such guilty creatures as I: And I have heard of this salvation; but I have no share in it. To this very hour *The wrath of God abideth on me*††. A storm of vengeance is arising around me, and I am excluded from the only ark in which I could be safe. Excluded by what? Why, to make it so much the more grievous, by my own folly." If we were to take upon us absolutely to pronounce concerning any of you, that you were excluded from the offers of gospel grace, you would no doubt resent it highly; as you reasonably might. Much more, were it in the power of a fellow mortal to deprive you of all share in this great salvation, might you cry out of it

* Gal. ii. 17. † John viii. 24. ‡ Mark xv. 16. § Luke xix. 27.
‖ Heb. x. 28. ¶ Mat. x. 15. ** Job xviii. 4. †† John iii. 36.

as a most hellish cruelty. You would not for the world do this wrong to another, if it were in your power. What, murder an immortal soul? You would tremble at the thought. But you tremble not at the thing. It is what you are doing, while you are rejecting the gospel. And will you never have compassion on your own poor bleeding souls, till the last incurable wound is given? Yet a little, a very little while, O sinners, and you will *lift up* your despairing *eyes in* the midst of your *torments*, and behold this salvation *afar off**. And alas, in how different a view will it then appear, even to the most indolent, and most presumptuous of you all? And how will it rend your very souls to think, "It was offered to me, and I would not accept it?" And what a doleful echo will there be amongst you, when you, and ten thousand more miserable creatures, are crying out "There was an almighty Saviour provided for sinners, and yet we are lost for ever; and are sunk so much lower than others, because we heard of him, and despised him!"

4. Let such sinners, as are awakened to a sense of their danger, be invited and persuaded, in the strength of divine grace, to come unto God by Christ."

All the awful and terrifying things we say, are dictated by the sincerest and tenderest love to your souls; and nothing can be farther from our intention, than to *Come to torment you before the time*†. Did we know, that your day of grace was past we would spare these unwelcome pains; and would rather permit you *to sleep on and take your rest.* But these are moments of hope, sinners, though you make them moments of extreme danger: And though there be no hope for you, while you continue to reject Christ, yet if you accept him, you have nothing to fear; but *This very day*, if you this day entertain him, shall *salvation come to your house*‡. *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation* §; and *after so long a time*, it is yet called *to-day*‖. Once more, and as to some of you, it may be for the last time, is the proclamation again made amongst you, Christ *Is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him;* and *those that come, he will in no wise cast out*¶ And do you not hear the proclamation with pleasure? And will you not obey it, as *Worthy of all acceptation***.

What if the scene were changed, and the proposals were addressed to those wretched creatures who are now in hell?

* Luke xvi. 23. † Mat. viii. 29. ‡ Luke xix. 9. § 2 Cor. vi. 2.
‖ Heb. iv. 7. ¶ John vi. 37. ** 1 Tim. i. 15.

What if God should send an ambassador to them, and give him authority to address them to some such purpose as this? "Desparing creatures, I am now come amongst you, not as a messenger of vengeance, but of peace. God has at length looked on your miseries with a compassionate eye; and there is a ray of mercy, darting through this gloom from the throne of grace, and from the Sun of Righteousness. The proposals you so long heard with indifference, and which you have so much longer remembered in the bitterness of your souls, are once more renewed. If you *Cry unto him*, even *out of these depths*, he will hear you; if you will submit your souls to his government and his grace, he will save you, and I am commissioned in his name to assure you, that not only shall these gates of hell be thrown open for your release, but those of heaven shall be opened too for your admittance."

Sinners, let your own consciences say, how you imagine at least, that such a proposal would be received by condemned spirits. Do you not think, that, as one forcibly expresses it, they would even leap in their chains? Do you not think, the marks of long horror and despair would immediately vanish from their faces; that their eyes would sparkle with hope and joy; and that they would begin the work of praise even with their flaming tongues? But are not you yourselves in the same condemnation, though the sentence be not yet executed? Why then do you now despise those rivers of mercy, the smallest drop of which you will hereafter desire in vain?

Alas! what we have here described, is merely an imaginary scene. Millions of ages shall roll away in sad succession, and no such proposals be made to the inhabitants of hell; nor to you sinners, if you come into that place of torment. But they are now made good in earnest; and therefore, *To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts**. Oh force us not another day, for the deliverance of our own souls, to bear a dreadful testimony to the condemnation of yours; but hearken to these embassies of peace, and let us intreat and persuade you *to be reconciled*†. This is still the message, the invitation, the charge, even the same that you heard from the beginning: Come unto God by Christ. Behold a gracious God, stretching out his arms to receive you: Behold a compassionate Redeemer, yet waiting to introduce you to his favourable presence: And all the faithful subjects of his kingdom, here and above, are longing to see it erected in your souls. The thought even of

* Heb. iii. 15. † 2 Cor. v. 20.

our own salvation, would be still sweeter to us, if we had a probable hope of sharing it with you. And shall earth and heaven expect and desire it in vain? and will you, as it were, grieve both; that hell may rejoice in your ruin, and that devils may insult over you, and upbraid you, as having with your own hands thrust away that salvation, of which all their malice and their rage might in vain have attempted to deprive you? You will then, alas, *Find no place for repentance, though*, like *Esau*, you *seek it carefully with tears**.

Alas, my friends, what more shall I say? Could I find out any more weighty arguments, any more plain, serious, and affecting, forms of address, I would go on, though the discourse should swell beyond its due bounds; though my own strength were impaired by the earnestness of it; and though a vain, wretched, unbelieving world should deride at that earnestness as enthusiasm and madness. Nay, who that knows the importance of immortal souls, would not go on to plead in such a cause, though minutes and hours were to be struck off from his life for every word that he utters in it, could even such an expensive service be sure of success? But that depends upon God, and to him we would look for it. In the mean time, I dismiss you with this one word: *Whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear*, he in whose name I speak, is witness, that the embassy is delivered; and such words as these remain recorded in the *book of his remembrance*, and will sooner or later be brought to yours.

5. "Let such as are desirous of coming to God by Christ, take encouragement from the declaration of the text."

We are not altogether *Ignorant of satan's devices*†: We know, by frequent observation and experience, how soon he can turn the syren's song, into the roaring of a lion; what efforts he makes, to drive the awakened soul into the agonies of despair, and to persuade him that he has thrown himself beyond the reach of mercy. But, if he be practising such cruel artifices on any soul in this assembly, I do, in the name of our Lord and Master, charge the lie on the father of falsehoods. You have perhaps a great many things to plead against yourselves; such as, the number, the enormity, and aggravation of your sins: You will say, they have been committed against the clearest light, against the tenderest love, against admonitions, more serious resolutions, most solemn covenant engagements: But all these pleas, and a

* Heb. xii. 17. † 2 Cor. ii. 11.

thousand more, are answered in this one word, *He is able to save to the uttermost, them that come unto God by him.* Is it still matter of doubt? Turn aside then, and more attentively view the trophies of his grace and power, erected in his word, erected on purpose for our encouragement, *on whom the ends of the world are come.*

Behold Paul in his unconverted state, *A blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious**. He appears to have divested himself, not only of that gentleness of manners, which might reasonably have been expected from a man of so liberal an education, but even of the sentiments of common humanity; furiously *breathing out threatnings and slaughters against the saints*†, without the least regard to innocence of life, or to tenderness of age or sex. Yet at the appearance of an Almighty Saviour, this furious barbarian was melted and subdued: In the full career of his blind and cruel rage, he falls down at the feet of that *Jesus whom he persecuted*, and cries out the very next moment, with the lowest submission, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do*‡? By the power of Christ, the fiend was transformed into an angel; *He preached the faith, which* just before *he endeavoured to destroy*§; and quickly learnt such language as this, *Neither bonds nor imprisonments move me; nor do I count my life dear unto me, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God*‖.

The Corinthians were debauched and abandoned to a proverb, the scandal of their country, and the reproach of their nature. For when the apostle had been reckoning up a catalogue of the most infamous sinners; such, as *fornicators, and idolaters, and adulterers, and effeminate, and abusers of themselves with mankind, and thieves, and covetous, and drunkards, and revilers, and extortioners;* he adds surprising words, and oh what surprising grace do they imply! *Such were some of you*¶; such, that one would almost have expected, that lightning from heaven should have blasted them, or that the earth should have opened a passage into hell: *But* instead of this, says the apostle to these very men, *ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.* The blessed Jesus did not upbraid them with their former crimes, but poured forth his Spirit upon them in

* 1 Tim. i. 13. † Acts ix. 1. ‡ Acts ix. 5, 6.
§ Gal. i. 23. ‖ Acts xx. 23, 24. ¶ 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11.

so abundant a degree, that their faith was every where celebrated, and *They came behind in no gift* *.

If yet we can imagine any crime more notorious than some of those, which are charged on the Corinthian converts in their natural state, it must surely be that, which the sun could not behold without horror, nor the earth sustain without trembling; the murder of our Lord Jesus Christ, that innocent, that holy, that divine person, with all the circumstances of the most inhuman cruelty. They had known his exemplary conversation, they had heard his heavenly discourses, they had seen his divine miracles; yet in spite of all these, the outrageous Jews seize him as a pest of human society, drag him before a heathen tribunal, extort a sentence of condemnation against him, and at length, after a thousand indignities and barbarities, nail him to the cross by the hands of the Romans. Yet would he shew, that even these rebels were not beyond the reach of his power and grace: For no sooner was the dispensation of the spirit opened, but *Three thousand* of them were converted in one day; they *gladly received the word, and were baptized* in token of it† ; and notwithstanding all the efforts which the subtilty, or fury of the enemies could use to draw them away from it, *They continued stedfast in the doctrine and fellowship of the apostles, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*‡: And they are now in heaven, rejoicing in the presence of that Jesus whom they murdered, and ascribing their eternal salvation to that blood which themselves shed.

And now, methinks, I am at a loss to imagine, what unbelief can find to object against such instances and examples as these, especially when backed with so many encouraging promises. Can you say worse of yourselves, than that you are *the chief of sinners?* But Paul will tell you, that he was so; and that *For this cause, he obtained mercy, that in him, as chief, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern to those that shall hereafter believe*§. And all the other examples are no doubt recorded for the very same purpose, that you *Through comfort of the scriptures might have hope*‖. Therefore, *when your hearts are overwhelmed within you, look unto the rock which is higher than you*¶. *Look unto Jesus, and you will be lightened; and your faces will not be ashamed***. When Satan is plying you with his *fiery darts*, wield them off by *The shield of faith*††, and, as it were, hurl them back into the face of the temp-

* 1 Cor. i. 7. † Acts ii. 41. ‡ Acts ii. 42. § 1 Tim. i. 16.
‖ Rom. xv. 4. ¶ Psal. lxi. 2. ** Psal. xxxiv. 5. †† Eph. vi. 16.

ter. Let all his endeavours to deter you from it, engage you to adhere so much the more stedfastly to your resolution, of throwing yourselves at the feet of Christ: And let no one fear, that he should be the first sinner that ever perished there; for it cannot be, unless almighty power be weakened, and infinite compassions be exhausted.

6. Let those who have been enabled "to come unto God by Christ, be thankful and courageous, in the views of the promised salvation."

My brethren, let me urge you to abound in the blessed work of praise, for which none on earth have so much reason as you. It is matter of thankfulness, but to hear of this salvation; how much more then, to have it brought home to our house, to our heart, so as to be able through grace to say, "This salvation is mine!" Oh remember, it was the same grace which first sent it, that has rendered it effectual. Reflect, I intreat you, Sirs, on your own hearts: Had you not once your prejudice against the gospel, as well as others? How unwilling were you to understand the method of salvation it taught? And when you did understand it, how much more unwilling were you to submit to it? Yet now, those very parts of the scheme, which were once your peculiar aversion, are become your peculiar joy.

Adore the work of divine grace, and take encouragement from it. Remember the connection, which there is, between *Coming to God by Christ*, and *being saved* by him *even to the uttermost*. Your deliverance from the curse of the law, from the tyranny of Satan, and from the power of sin, is but the beginning of this salvation: But it will at length be accomplished; and you should triumph in the expectation of it. "Various enemies surround me," may the christian say, "and they sometimes seem even ready to swallow me up: The world besets me with innumerable snares; Satan is daily seeking by his crafty wiles to get advantage over me; the flesh is ever ready to betray me; and death is threatening to destroy me with its sting: But yet *In all these things* I am *more than a conqueror, through him that hath loved me**. Vain world, I shall quickly leave thee! Wily infernal serpent, *The God of peace shall shortly bruise thee under my feet*†! Corrupt deceitful flesh, I shall be happily delivered from thee! And *death*, thou king of terrors, I am assured, thou shalt be *Swallowed up in victory*‡! Though thou mayest kill me, yet thou canst not hurt me; for *I know*,

* Rom. viii. 37. † Rom. xvi. 20. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 54.

that my Redeemer liveth;* and *because he liveth, I shall live also†.*" These are sentiments and views, worthy our character, as christians, worthy of those who are the saved of the Lord. Let us *Take for our helmet* this hope *of salvation‡*, and it will guard our head in every danger of life and death; till at length we exchange that helmet for the celestial *Crown, which the Lord shall give us in that day§*, when in the completest sense he shall save all his people to the uttermost, and they shall all appear with him in the brightest glories of this great and perfect salvation.

* Job xix. 25. † John xiv. 19. ‡ Eph. vi. 17. § 2 Tim. iv. 8.

SERMON VI.

POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST.

The Tenderness of Christ to the Lambs of his Flock.

Isa. xl. 11.——*He shall feed his Flock like a Shepherd; he shall gather the Lambs with his Arms, and carry them in his Bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with Young.*

IT is well known, that there are three most illustrious offices, under which our Redeemer is often spoken of in scripture; those of the Prophet, the Priest, and the King of his Church. And there are several other characters, either coincident with those, or subservient to them, which are frequently mentioned and are worthy of our regard; amongst which that of a Shepherd is peculiarly remarkable, as often occurring in the word of God, and affording abundant matter, both for the instruction, and the consolation of his people.

I shall not now enumerate all the passages, in which our Lord is described under this character, both in the Old Testament, and the New. It may be sufficient here to remind you, that he was plainly foretold by Ezekiel, as that one Shepherd, whom God would *set over* his people *to feed them, even his servant David*, i. e. the Messiah, David's Son; *he*, says the prophet, *Shall feed them, and he shall be their Shepherd**. And Christ accordingly speaks of himself, as *The good Shepherd*†; and is spoken of by one and another of the apostles, as *The great Shepherd of the Sheep*‡, and *The chief Shepherd*§. So that on the whole, if the words of the text had a more immediate reference to the Father, they might with great propriety be applied to Christ, by whom the Father exercises his pastoral care of his people.

The chapter is opened with very reviving words; *Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God:* And to assure them that these consolations addressed to them were indeed *glad tidings of great joy*, and worthy to be introduced in a very pompous manner, mention is made of a very remarkable herald sent before, whose *Voice* was to *cry in the wilderness, prepare*

* Ezek. xxxiv. 23. † John x. 11. ‡ Heb. xiii. 20. § 1 Pet. v. 4.

*ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desart a high-way for our God**; i. e. let every obstruction immediately be removed: A scripture so expressly applied to *John the baptist*, as the *forerunner of Christ*†, that it may be sufficient to fix the sense of the context, with those who have any regard to the authority of the New Testament, in explaining the Old.

To confirm the faith of Israel in this important message, a solemn proclamation is made, ver. 6. *The voice* (that is, the voice of God, speaking to me in this vision,) *said unto me, Cry;* that is, raise thy voice as loud as possible: *And I said, what shall I cry?* The following words are evidently the answer, which God returns to this question of the prophet; q. d. "Proclaim this awful and seasonable truth, *All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field*, which is yet more frail and short-lived than the grass itself: *The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever.* q. d. Were it only the promise of a man, you might indeed doubt of its accomplishment; were it only the word of the mightiest princes on earth, it might give you but a trembling and precarious hope: Man is a dying creature, and all the most cheerful hopes, which are built on him, may quickly perish; *But the word of our God*, even *that word*, as it is explained by the apostle Peter, *which by the gospel is preached unto you, shall stand for ever*‡, as the firm basis of your hope and confidence, and shall be certainly accomplished in the final redemption and salvation of his people."

The heavenly voice still continues to speak to the prophet, who was honoured with this happy message, and charges him to deliver it with the greatest cheerfulness and zeal. "*O thou that bringest good tidings to Zion*," (for so I think the words should be rendered as they are by some, and particularly in the margin of your bibles,) *get thee up into the high mountain*, some place of eminence, from whence thou mayest be universally heard: *Oh thou that bringest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up;* and be not afraid, lest the event should not answer the promise, but *Say unto the cities of Judah, behold your God*§. For *The Lord God will come with a strong hand;* i. e. the kingdom of the Messiah shall be erected with a glorious display of the divine power; and *his arm shall rule for him*, as in former instances of most formidable opposition, *His* own *right-hand, and his holy arm*

* Ver. 3. John i. 23.

† Compare ver. 3. with Mat. iii. 3. Mark i. 3. Luke iii. 4.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 25.

§ Ver. 9.

have gotten him the victory:* His kingdom shall be administered with the exactest equity and wisdom; for *His reward is with him*, to render to every man according to his doings; *and his work is before him†;* i. e. he has the completest view of it, and keeps his eye always fixed upon it."

Yet, as it is added in the words of the text, the authority of a prince, and the dignity of a God, shall be attempered by the gentleness of a most compassionate Shepherd: *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

You have already heard of that strong hand with which Jesus our Lord is come, and of that victorious energy, with which *his arm shall rule for him.* His name has been proclaimed amongst you, as *The Lord of hosts, the Lord strong and mighty, able to save unto the uttermost‡.* Let us now consider him in this amiable character, in which our text describes him; for this renders those views of his almighty power delightful, which our guilt would otherwise render dreadful to us.

Christians, I would hope it is your desire, whenever you attend on the institutions of the gospel, to see Jesus. I may now say to you, in the words of Pilate, on a very different occasion, *Behold the man§!* He appears not indeed in his royal robes, or in his priestly vestments; but he wears the habit of condescension and love; and is not the less amiable, though he may not seem equally majestic, while he bears the pastoral rod instead of the royal sceptre, and *feeds his flock like a shepherd, gathering up the* feeble *lambs in his arms, and bearing them in his bosom, and gently leading those that are with young.*

You will naturally observe,——that the text declares Christ's general care of all his people,——and bespeaks his peculiar gracious regard to those, whose circumstances require a peculiar tenderness.

1. We may observe "his general care of all his people."

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: They may each of them therefore say with David, *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want: He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters; He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake‖.* The church is his fold; and ordinances are his pastures; and

* Psal. xcviii. 1. † Ver. 10. ‡ See the foregoing sermons, especially the second.
§ John xix. 5. ‖ Psal. xxiii. 1—3.

his sheep shall be nourished by them, till they grow up to that blessed world, where, in a much nobler sense than here, all *The children of God that were scattered abroad* shall be *gathered together in one**, and shall appear as *one sheepfold* under the *great Shepherd and Bishop of souls*†. We have abundant reason to admire his condescension and love, in the view of these things, and to congratulate the happiness of his people, as under such pastoral care. But I will not enlarge on this general view, or on these reflections upon it, that I may leave myself room to insist on what I chiefly proposed in the choice of these words; that is,

2. "Christ's peculiar concern for those, whose circumstances require a peculiar tenderness."

This is expressed in those words; *He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young*, i. e. he will consider their weakness and infirmity, and conduct them as they are able to bear it: Which is also implied in that nearly parallel text, in which we are told, *He shall seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and bind up that which was broken, and strengthen that which was sick*‡.

This is the general import of the words; but for the fuller explication and improvement of them, give me leave,

I. To enumerate the cases and circumstances of some christians, who may properly be considered, as the lambs of the flock, or as those *that are with young*.

II. To consider what may be intimated concerning the Redeemer's tenderness to them, as it is expressed by his *gathering them in his arms, and carrying them in his bosom, and gently leading them.*

III. I will endeavour to shew, what abundant reason there is to depend upon it, that the great Shepherd will deal in a very tender manner with such. And then,

IV. I will direct to the proper improvement of the whole.

May he who hath said, *Comfort ye my people*, enable me to do it in the most effectual manner! May he *Give me the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season to them that are weary*§, and *To appoint* to the weeping and trembling soul

* John xi. 52. † Compare John x. 16. with 1 Pet. ii. 25. ‡ Ezek. xxxiv. 15, 16. § Isa. l. 4.

beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness !*

I. I am to mention the case of some christians, who may properly be considered, as represented by the lambs of the flock, or by sheep that are with young.

Now in the general, you know, these expressions may signify all who are young and tender. You know, a young lamb is a very feeble creature, and when deserted by its dam, if not assisted by the shepherd, is in great danger of perishing, and of breathing out its innocent life, almost as soon as it has received it: And as Jacob observes†, the *Sheep* that are *with young*, or that have lately yeaned, are not capable of such fatigues as the other cattle; but *if over-driven* so much as *one day*, their tenderness is such, that *they would die*. And therefore when our Lord was spoken of under the character of a shepherd, it was very just, as well as very elegant, to use such figures as these, to represent all those of his people who stood in need of peculiar compassion and care. Now you may easily apprehend, those are to be considered as included here,——who are of a tender age,——or but of little standing in religion, or whose spirits are naturally feeble,——or whose circumstances are distressful and calamitous, on account of any peculiar affliction, either of body, or of mind.

1. It is evident, that "they who are of a tender age," may with peculiar propriety be called the lambs of the flock.

They resemble lambs, in respect of their youth; and in some degree likewise, on account of that innocence and simplicity, for which our Lord singled them out, to recommend them to the imitation of all his followers, and even of his apostles, assuring them that they must *Become like little children*, if they would hope to *enter into the kingdom of heaven*‡. You, children, will therefore endeavour to mind what I say this day; for I am to speak to you; to speak to you about the kindness and care of Christ towards you. I assure you, I speak of it with pleasure: And surely you should hear it with pleasure; and your little hearts should even leap for joy, to think that a minister should be sent to address himself to you, as the lambs of Christ's flock. Oh that every one of you may indeed be so! You will hear, what a kind

* Isa. lxi. 3. † Gen. xxxiii. 13. ‡ Mat. xviii. 3.

Shepherd you have, and how graciously he will lay you in his bosom!

2. "They who are but of late standing in religion, may also be called the lambs of Christ's flock."

Though perhaps they are more advanced in age, than many others, they are but young in grace, and in christian experience; they are in the lowest form in Christ's school, and perhaps have much of the infirmity and weakness of children. They have also some peculiar difficulties to struggle with from within, and often from without, which may render them more sensible of those infirmities. Such are therefore called *Babes in Christ**; while christians of greater growth and experience, are called *Strong men*†.

3. The language of the text may also with peculiar propriety be applied to "those, whose spirits are naturally very feeble and timorous."

The constitutions of different persons are most apparently various; and the infirmities, which attend some, render them the objects of peculiar compassion. To them perhaps *The grasshopper is a burden*‡; and what by others would hardly be felt at all, quite overloads and depresses them. While some of their fellow christians are as bold as the lion, these like the fearful lamb, start and tremble almost at the shaking of a leaf. This excessive tenderness of the mind, which shews itself often on very small occasions, is much more visible where their eternal interests seem to be concerned. The importance of those interests appears so great, that they are even terrified with the view. A sadness of soul, which often seizes them, disposes them to apprehend and suspect the worst concerning themselves. And hence it may so happen, that an incapacity to attend long to the exercises of devotion, arising from a natural weakness of nerves and spirits, shall appear to them as a black mark of a soul spiritually dead, and be thought a sufficient ground for applying to themselves all those awful things, which the *hypocrites in Zion* have so much reason to be afraid of. Or when they view the difficulties of the christian life, they are ready to sink under the prospect, and to conclude, that they shall lose that little good they have attained, and shall surely and speedily fall by the hands of such formidable enemies. It is very probable, that *The hearts* of many who hear me, *know* in

* 1 Cor. iii. 1. † Rom. xv. 1. ‡ Eccles. xii. 5.

this respect *their own bitterness* and burden*: But let them remember, it is known also by the compassionate *Shepherd of Israel;* and shall be graciously remembered, and considered by him.

4. The gracious promise in the text may be considered, as referring to "those, whose circumstances are peculiarly distressful, on account of afflictions, whether of body, or of mind."

Who is there among you this day, *that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant;* and yet *walketh in darkness, and hath no light?* He is now called to *trust in the name of the Lord, and to stay himself upon his God*†. What christians are there, whose *Days are spent in grief*, and perhaps *their years in sighing*‡; so that when their disappointments or maladies, their temptations or desertions press hard upon them, they are scarce able to rise under the burden, and to believe that they shall be any longer supported? But on the contrary are ready to cry out, *Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies*§? To them does this compassionate Saviour appear, to *Lift up the hands that hang down*, and to strengthen *the feeble knees*‖, to sweeten their sorrows, and silence their fears, to confirm their hopes, and awaken their joys. Let the young and the unexperienced, the timorous, and the afflicted, whose desires are towards him, and their hearts waiting upon him, let them all hear it with pleasure: If they can be safe in the arms of Christ, if they can be easy in his bosom, if they can be cheerful under his gentlest conduct, they may dismiss their anxieties, for to them, and to such as they are, does he particularly speak in these gracious words of the text, assuring them, that *he will gather* them as *the lambs in his arms*, that *he will carry them in his bosom*, and that *he will gently lead them*, as ewes which are great with young. Which brings me,

II. To consider what may be intimated concerning the Redeemer's tenderness to them, as expressed by these pastoral phrases.

All the expressions do evidently speak a most affectionate care; and they do more particularly intimate,—that he will be ready to receive,—protect,—and comfort them,—and that he

* Prov. xiv. 10. † Isa. l. 10. ‡ Psal. xxxi. 10.
§ Psal. lxxvii. 9. ‖ Heb. xii. 12.

will moderate their trials in proportion to their strength. The three former of these are implied, in *gathering them in his arms, and laying them in his bosom;* and the last, in his *gently leading those that are with young.*

1. The text evidently declares "the readiness of the blessed Jesus to receive the weakest soul that applies to him."

He will gather them in his arms: i. e. at least, his arms shall be open to them. For *Though the Lord be high, he hath respect unto the lowly*;* and he will not despise the humblest creature, that thinks himself most beneath his regards.—Children, though they can do so little for his service, though they hardly know how to breathe out a prayer before him, or what blessings they should ask at his hands; yet they shall be welcome to him. He understands their poor broken language; and he hears it with pleasure.——When the soul is but just setting out in religion, and seems, in a spiritual sense, as helpless as a new-born infant; when there is little knowledge, and perhaps a very strong struggle between nature and grace; he will not *Despise the day of small things*†. When the christian is ready to say the hardest things against himself, when a sense of former follies, and of present defects, lays him even in the dust at the foot of a Redeemer, this gracious Shepherd will raise the drooping creature: And when he is ready to say, Lord, *I am*, as I deserve to be, *cast out of thy sight*‡; he will gather him among the lambs in his arms, he will open them wide to receive and embrace him.—Trembling souls, hear it to your comfort: In all your weakness, under all your guilt, in the midst of your fears, in the midst of your sorrows, you may come to Jesus with a holy boldness, and assure yourselves, that he *Will not cast you out*§. That he will *in no wise*, i. e. by no means, on no consideration whatsoever, do it. But,

2. The phrase farther implies, "that he will provide for their safety."

And therefore it is added, that he will not only *gather them in his arms*, but *carry them in his bosom;* which expresses both the tenderness, and the continuance of his care for this purpose. You know, when the poor trembling lamb is lodged, not only in the *arms*, but in the *bosom* of the shepherd, while it remains there, it is so secure, that the wild beast, or the robber, must conquer the shepherd, before he can hurt the lamb.

* Psal. cxxxviii. 6. † Zech. iv. 10. ‡ Jonah ii. 4. § John vi. 37.

So when the feeble and fearful christian hears the lions of hell, as it were, roaring around him, and sees them just ready to devour him, he may fly to this sanctuary, and defy them all; for *Everlasting arms* shall be *underneath him**, and shall compass him round for his defence and safety. *I give unto my sheep eternal life, says Christ,* in the most resolute and determinate manner, *and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand*†. "Reviving words!" may the believing soul say; "for they assure me, that if I am in that hand, to which I have been so frequently and so solemnly committing my eternal all, nothing can destroy me, that is not able to oppose, and even to conquer Christ,—that almighty Saviour,—whom, when he was on earth in feeble mortal clay, all the hosts of hell, with their united malice and rage, assaulted in vain, and were subdued and triumphed over by that very death, which they so eagerly laboured to accomplish; for on the cross *He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly*‡."

It may properly be added here, that as the lamb cannot be destroyed, so neither can it be seduced, when in the shepherd's arms. The foolish creature while at a distance from him, may wander it knows not whither, and lose itself in some barren and pathless wilderness, where it cannot subsist, and from whence it cannot return. And thus far the humble believer will own the parallel too just,—will own that he has again and again *Gone astray like a lost sheep*§: "Yet Lord," may he add, "I adore thy faithful care in reducing me to thy fold again, and am encouraged this day to hope, thou wilt not suffer me to perish by my wanderings. Thine eye and thy hand, are my security, against the prevalency of inward corruptions, as well as outward temptations; and I trust, that neither the one nor the other, *Shall be able* finally *to separate me from thy love*‖, or to deprive me of the blessings connected with it."

3. The promise in the text farther implies, "that Christ will consult the comfort of his people," as well as their safety.

He will carry the lambs in his bosom; carry them, when they are so weak, as not to be able to walk, like the rest of the flock. Or rather, here may be a beautiful allusion to a circumstance, which must often occur in the place where Isaiah wrote; where it might perhaps be usual, when a new fallen lamb was

* Deut. xxxiii. 27. † John x. 28. ‡ Col. ii. 15.
§ Psal. cxix. 176. ‖ Rom. viii. 39.

exposed to the chilness of the morning or evening air, in a manner which might have been dangerous to its health or its life, that the shepherd, when he saw it lying in this weak and helpless condition, should take it up into his bosom, and fold about it part of his long garment, which most people wore in those eastern countries; and there the little helpless creature would lie, not only safe, but warm and easy, till it was revived and strengthened. So pleasantly, and delightfully, is the poor trembling soul lodged in the bosom of Christ. It is made to rejoice in his love, as well as his power, and to own him as *The chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely**. You know, the christian is described, as *Rejoicing in Christ Jesus*†, and as *Glorying in him*‡: The weary mariner does not rejoice so much when the danger and fatigues of his voyage are over, and he sees himself safe at home, and meets the kindest of his long absent friends there; as the burdened soul rejoices, when by faith he is led to a Redeemer, and received with the assurances of his love and grace. Nor would he exchange that soft and compassionate bosom, for the choicest and sweetest breasts of wordly consolation, of which the sinner may suck, but can never be satisfied from them.

4. The promise in the text must farther intimate, that Christ will accommodate the "trials of the weak christian to his strength," and will lay no more upon him, than he shall be able to bear.

Therefore it is said, *he will gently lead those that are with young*: As the shepherd is careful, in such a circumstance, not to over-drive the cattle, lest both young and old be destroyed §. *God*, says the apostle *is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tried above what ye are able; but will with the trial make a way for your escape, that ye may be able to bear it*‖. In this instance, is the tenderness of Christ remarkable, and his wisdom too.—— As a father would not crush his child by a heavy burden, but lets him bear what is proportionable to his years and strength; till at last, by insensible degrees, he grows capable of carrying with ease and pleasure, what would before have overwhelmed him. Thus does Christ deal with the feeble christian. He calls him out to easier duties, to less formidable combats, to lighter afflictions first: He *Stays his rough wind in the day of the east wind*¶; and thus trains him up to pass, with fortitude and cheerfulness,

* Cant. v. 10, 16. † Phil. iii. 3. ‡ Gal. vi. 14.
§ Gen. xxxiii. 13. ‖ 1 Cor. x. 13. ¶ Isa. xxvii. 8.

through those more trying scenes, which he would before have trembled to behold in a distant prospect.

All these comfortable and important particulars seem naturally contained in the words of the text. You easily apprehend, that many of them, as applied to the great Shepherd of souls, might have been confirmed by reasonings and scriptures, which I have here omitted: But I was cautious not too far to anticipate what is to be offered under the third general, where I am to shew, how much "reason there is to expect, that the blessed Jesus will exercise this gentle and affectionate care, towards the feeble of the flock." The subject is too copious, to be discussed, or entered upon, in these few remaining moments. Let me, therefore, at present conclude with reminding you, that all is already proved by the authority of the text; and I hope, the truth of it has been sealed, by the experience of many that hear me this day. May it be sealed, by the experience of all! and all will then say, as surely as some of us can, that when we have heard the most that can be said of the grace of a Redeemer, and when the boldest or the softest figures are used to illustrate it *The half has not been told us**. How much more shall we say it, when we come to the fold above? To which may his mercy at length conduct us, in such ways as his wisdom shall chuse! And supported by *his arms*, and cherished *in his bosom*, we shall pursue them with pleasure. Amen.

* 1 Kings x. 7.

SERMON VII.

POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST

Proofs of Christ's Tenderness, and the Improvement we should make of it.

Isa. xl. 11.——*He shall feed his Flock like a Shepherd; he shall gather the Lambs with his Arm, and carry them in his Bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

IT should certainly be our care, when we are handling such figurative scriptures as these, that we do not offer violence to them, and force them, by a multitude of fanciful accommodations, to speak what it was by no means pertinent to the design of the sacred writer to have said. Yet on the other hand, it appears to me but a grateful return to the divine condescension in using such language, to dwell attentively on the images, with which God is sometimes pleased to clothe his addresses to us; that we may use them to such purposes, as seem to have been intended by them. Especially is such a care as this reasonable, when the figure is not expressed in a single word, but diversified and adorned with such a variety of expression and imagery, as we find in the text. In such a case, it is fit, that the beauties of every part should be traced: And there is this evident advantage in it, that it may not only make way for the easier entrance of important truths into the mind; but may give room to present the most familiar and accustomed thoughts, in such a diversity of dress, at different times, as may make them more pleasing to the mind, than they might probably be, if repeated in the plainest language, so often as the importance of them requires they should be insisted upon.

Perhaps it is for this reason, among others, that such a variety of metaphorical and allegorical language is used, both in the Old and New Testament, in describing the offices and characters of the great Redeemer. And for this reason also it is, that when such passages have occurred, as the subject of our public meditations, I have thought it more proper to dwell pretty largely on the various clauses of the text, than immediately to fix on some common place in divinity, which might easily have

been introduced, and to treat it in a systematical form. I bless God, that the attention with which such discourses have generally been heard, and the good effects with which they have often been attended, have encouraged me to pursue this method myself, and to recommend it to others; though some may reckon it a part of a solid and rational taste, to think very meanly of it.

With these views I have entered on the subject, in the following method. Having proved, that the words refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, *The great Shepherd of the sheep**, I have,

I. Enumerated the cases of various sorts of persons, whom we may suppose to be represented by the lambs of the flock, or by those *that are with young*, they being those that require peculiar tenderness.

And here I have mentioned,——those who are of a tender age,——or of a short standing in religion;——those, whose spirits are naturally feeble;——and those, whose circumstances are peculiarly calamitous, on account of any heavy affliction, either of body or of mind, whether arising from providential dispensations, or from the hidings of God's face, or from the assault of spiritual enemies. So that christians in such circumstances as these, will, I hope, consider themselves, as peculiarly interested in the comfortable things, which are now farther to be laid before you. And may the blessed Spirit apply the consolation to each of their souls!

II. I have also considered the Redeemer's tenderness to such, as expressed by gathering them *with his arm*, laying them *in his bosom*, and *gently leading them*.

And here I observed, that these gracious and affectionate words might be intended to express,——his readiness to receive,—to protect,—and to comfort them;——and his care to moderate their exercises and burdens in proportion to their strength. These are very important particulars, and most evidently suited to the necessities and desires of the feeble christian. I hope therefore you will attend with pleasure, while I now proceed,

III. To shew, what abundant reason there is to believe, that *the great Shepherd* will deal in this tender manner; that he will thus *gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young*.

* Heb. xiii. 20.

As the lamb sometimes fears the shepherd, and is ready to flee from him, when he comes towards it with the kindest designs: So it is also evident from experience, that the comfort of the christian is often much impaired, for want of that confidence in the care and tenderness of a Redeemer, which is so reasonable, as well as so delightful, that one would wonder it should after all be so very deficient, even in the minds of those, who are no strangers to his word, and who have themselves tasted of his grace. Permit me therefore at present to argue it,——from the general character under which he appears,——from the representations both of the prophets and apostles,——from his own declarations as recorded by the evangelists,——and from the experience of those, who have committed themselves to him.

1. We may argue this grace and tenderness of Christ "from the general character under which he appears, as the Redeemer and Saviour of his people."

Is not this a character full of gentleness and goodness? Is it not instead of ten thousand arguments to prove, that if he pitied us in that low estate, in which he at first found us, *His mercy* towards us will *endure for ever**? View our blessed Redeemer in the abasement of his abode among men: View him in the agonies, in which he finished the long scene of his sorrows and sufferings; and then say, What but love brought him from heaven, and kept him on earth? What but love stretched him on the cross, and laid him in the grave? And can any expression of tenderness be too great to be expected, after such amazing effects of it have already been experienced? Surely, as he himself argues, *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends*†: But, as the apostle justly observes, *His love is commended towards us*, it is set off by this important circumstance, *In that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*‡: And how cheerfully may we depend upon it, that *If when we were enemies, we were reconciled by his death, we shall now by his life obtain* complete *salvation*‖; and his living care will accomplish, what his dying love has begun? All the blessed consequences I have already mentioned, and a long train of others, follow from this happy principle. He has graciously assumed the character and title of a Shepherd; and surely that name implies all the particulars, which we have now been representing to you. His word, you know, sets a mark of infamy upon those shepherds, that *Have not strengthened the*

* Psal. cxxxvi. 23. † John xv. 13. ‡ Rom. v. 8. ‖ Rom. v. 10.

*diseased, nor healed the sick, nor bound up that which was broken, nor brought again that which was driven away, nor sought that which was lost; but who had ruled with force and cruelty**. Surely *the good Shepherd* will not be like these: Surely, if he will *feed his flock like* such *a shepherd*, he cannot fail of *gathering the lambs with his arm*, and *carrying them in his bosom*, and of being very tender of the lives of those, for whom his own life was given.

2. We may argue the tenderness and grace of the Redeemer, "from those express testimonies which are borne to it in the prophetic writings."

This is mentioned as a remarkable part of his character, when considered not only in his pastoral office, but also in his royal dignity. To him do those words of Zechariah refer, *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; for behold thy king cometh unto thee: He is just, having salvation, and lowly, and riding*, not as other princes, perhaps, on a managed horse, or in a splendid triumphal chariot; but according to the simplicity of more ancient days, when princes appeared amongst their subjects, as fathers amongst their children; so shall he come, *riding on an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass*†. Thus too Isaiah introduces God as speaking of him, in those remarkable words‡, which are also applied to him by the evangelist§, as the former are‖, *Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul is delighted; he shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets: A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoaking flax shall he not quench, till he shall bring forth judgment unto truth* or victory; i. e. till he perfect his gracious design of making righteousness and truth victorious over all opposition. Therefore is he spoken of, as a most proper person to accomplish the most compassionate purposes of the divine goodness; and is represented as rejoicing in the thought of his bearing such a commission, in those gracious words, (which were the foundation of his first public discourse, and which he so solemnly applied to himself in the synagogue of Nazareth¶; *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek, he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;*

* Ezek. xxxiv. 4. † Zech. ix. 9. ‡ Isa. xlii. 1—3. § Mat. xii. 18.
‖ Mat. xxi. 5. ¶ Luke iv. 17, 18.

*to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness**. So exactly does our Lord answer the lovely character of a righteous and peaceful Sovereign, drawn by David† in those last words of his, which many suppose ultimately to refer to the Messiah, *He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even as a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain.* And again‡, *He shall judge the poor of the people, and save the children of the needy:* And his people shall be so refreshed by his tender care, that *He shall come down like rain upon the* new *mown grass*, and *like showers that water the earth: He shall deliver the needy, when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper: He shall spare the poor and needy and shall save the souls of the needy: He shall redeem their souls from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight.* Many parallel expressions might be added to these; but the following heads are too copious to allow of a farther enlargement upon this.

3. I might largely argue the tenderness and grace of Christ, "from his conduct on earth in the days of his flesh."

The time would fail me, should I attempt to enumerate half the particular circumstances of it, that tend to illustrate this part of his character: I must only select a few, which are the most remarkable. And judge you, whether all that is foretold of him in the text, and in the other prophetical passages I have been referring you to, was not amply and sweetly accomplished in them.

It is said, *He will gather the lambs in his arms;* i. e. as I have been telling you above, the young and the weak shall be welcome to him: And did not our Lord sufficiently shew that they were so, when the little children were brought unto him? The disciples *forbad them*, as thinking it was beneath the dignity of so great a prophet, as their master was, to trouble himself about them. But observe it, children, for I believe it was in part recorded for your sakes, Jesus was greatly displeased with his disciples, that they should think he had no tenderness for such little creatures as you; and he said, *Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God: And he took them up in his arms, and laid his hands upon them, and blessed them*§: Do you not here see the

* Isa. lxi. 1, 3. † 2 Sam. xxiii. 4. ‡ Psal. lxxii. 4, 6, 12, 13, 14.
§ Mark x. 13—16.

text most beautifully illustrated, and fulfilled? Do you not here see *The great Shepherd, gathering the lambs in his arms, and laying them in his bosom?*—And does he not invite others also to that soft and pleasant repose, in those compassionate words, which surely none of you are such strangers in Israel as not to know? *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest**: And *Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out*†. Did he not also express a very gracious regard to such, when he so peculiarly recommends the care of them to Peter, just when he was leaving the world, taking that peculiarly affecting opportunity of assuring him, not only that it was his will that they should be regarded, but also that an affectionate care of them was the most acceptable instance, which Peter, and, by a parity of reason, his other ministers, could give of their love to him? *Lovest thou me?* if thou dost, *feed my lambs*, and *feed my sheep*‡.—Can we then imagine, that he himself will fail in his care of any of them? Especially when we consider the instances of his tenderness, to some who were not of his fold, as well as to many who were;—to one, in whom though he saw only some feeble traces and images of goodness, yet it is said, that *Jesus beholding him, loved him*§,—and to multitudes, over whom he wept, because they obstinately refused to be gathered in, and knew not *The things belonging to their peace*‖. Again,

The text tells us, *He shall gently lead those that are with young*: i. e. he shall accommodate his conduct to the weakness and infirmities of his people: And did not our Lord express this tenderness, when he taught his followers, *As they were able to bear it*¶; and was careful not to discourage them at first, by any unnecessary severities, lest it should be like putting *New wine into old bottles***, which might be easily broke by the fermentation of it?—And did not also this compassionate Shepherd appear ready *to bind up the broken, and to heal the sick*, when he so graciously excused the weakness of his disciples, though they fell asleep at a time, when one would have thought the agonies of their Lord should have turned them all into wakeful attention, and affectionate sympathy? Yet instead of severe reproaches, we find this kind apology in the mouth of their neglected injured Master, *The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*††.——To add no more on this head, it is well worth our observation, that when Peter had so shamefully

* Mat. xi. 28. † John vi. 37. ‡ John xxi. 15, 17. § Mark x. 21.
‖ Luke xix. 41, 42. ¶ Mark iv. 33. ** Mat. ix. 17. †† Mat. xxvi. 41.

denied him, and all the rest of the apostles had forsaken him, even when he might most reasonably have expected their kindest assistance, he does not after his resurrection express any keen and passionate resentments, but on the contrary, all is mildness and sweetness. At his first appearance to Mary Magdalen, he says to her, *Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God**. And a few moments after, when appearing to the other women in their return from the sepulchre, *Go tell my brethren*, says he, *that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me*†. He does not say, "Go and tell those cowardly perfidious creatures, that God has not abandoned me, though they so meanly did it." He does not say, "Go tell that perjured traitor, who even in my very sight and hearing disowned me and abjured me:" But, "*Go tell my brethren.*" And lest Peter should think himself excluded from the message, as peculiarly unworthy so kind a name, the angel, no doubt by our Lord's particular direction, names that poor penitent expressly, and says, go tell his disciples and *Peter, that he is risen*‡: As if it had been said, "Let that humble mourner know, that his dear Master is risen, and in the midst of his triumphs graciously remembers him, and sends him these glad tidings thus early, as a token that all is forgiven." Gracious Shepherd! who would not love thee? Who would not immediately cease his wanderings, to seek a retreat in thy compassionate bosom?

4. The compassion of our Redeemer is still farther illustrated "by those representations of it, which are made by the apostles, in what they have written since his ascension into glory."

You well know, that they were under the direction of the Spirit of Jesus, and had *The mind of Christ*§ in so perfect a manner, that what they say is in effect spoken by Christ himself. Now there are many passages in their writings, which loudly speak, and tenderly illustrate, the compassion of his heart.

The apostles sometimes expressly assert it; and sometimes they write, as taking it for granted, as a thing known, allowed, and indeed felt by every christian.—It is frequently asserted by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, in very expressive language. We are assured, that *We have not an High-priest, who*

* John xx. 17. † Mat. xxviii. 10. ‡ Mark xvi. 7. § 1 Cor. ii. 16.

cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but who was himself *in all points tempted like as we are**. And more than that, we are assured, that he submitted to the abasements of an incarnate state, on purpose that his sufferings might teach him a due sympathy: *It behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and a faithful High-priest, in things pertaining unto God;—for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted*†: As the Jewish high-priests being themselves compassed with infirmities, could *Have compassion on the ignorant, and such as were out of the way*‡.—In other places, the compassion of Christ is referred to, as universally known, and so great as to serve for a proverbial expression of the greatest kindness. Thus, when conjugal affection is recommended from the consideration of both being one flesh, the apostle adds, *No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church*§: Plainly intimating, that a man cannot have a more tender care of the members of his own body, than Christ has of his church and people. And elsewhere the apostle conjures christians, by *The bowels of Christ*‖, *By the meekness and gentleness of Christ*¶; and pleads, *If there be any consolation in Christ***. We can hardly conceive any assertions so expressive, as such oblique insinuations and appeals as these.

Yet I cannot omit that engaging illustration of this compassionate care of the great Shepherd, which is to be found in those epistles which he sent to the churches in Asia, by the hand of John, after he was received to the glories of his exalted state. By these it appears how distinctly he attended to the concerns of each of those churches, and therefore, no doubt, of each particular soul which constituted them; how diligently he observed, who were flourishing, and who were declining; that he might address them with encouragements, or admonitions, suited to their respective circumstances. It plainly appears, that notwithstanding all their peculiar advantages and obligations, there were many feeble and distempered souls among them, and some that were called out to very laborious services, and hazardous trials. Let me intreat you to observe, how the blessed Jesus *Lifts up the hands which were hanging down, and strengthens the feeble knees*††. He saw,

* Heb. iv. 15. † Heb. ii. 17, 18. ‡ Heb. v. 2. § Eph. v. 29.
‖ Phil. i. 8. ¶ 2 Cor. x. 1. ** Phil. ii. 1. †† Heb. xii. 12.

that the church of Ephesus had left its *First love**;—that the church of Sardis had *A name to live, but was dead*†; yet that there was a little handful amongst them, *Who had not defiled their garments*‡;—that the church of Philadelphia had but *A little strength*§;—and that of Laodicea was *Neither cold nor hot*‖: Yet a gracious Redeemer does not immediately disown them; but on the one hand, kindly admonishes them of the danger there was, lest growing apostacy and degeneracy should provoke him to *Remove their candlestick out of its place*,—to *cast them out as loathsome*,—or to *wound them with the sword of his mouth*, i. e. his word¶;—and on the other hand, he encourages them to greater fidelity and zeal, by a promise of eating of the fruit of *The tree of life***,—of being *clothed in white raiment*,—of being *confessed before the Father and his holy angels*††,—and of *sitting down with him on his* victorious *throne*‡‡.—And as for his faithful Smyrneans, he not only highly applauds their former conduct, but animates them against the terrors of imprisonment and other tribulations, by assuring them, he would *Give them a crown of life*§§.—And he fails not to tell the Philadelphians, that since, weak as they were, they had *Kept his word*, he also *would keep them from the* approaching *hour of temptation*, until at length he made them *pillars in the house of God* above, and gave them *a new name in his holy city*‖‖. You will please to take a more particular view of these epistles at your leisure; and you will see, in how amiable a manner the good Shepherd appears in them, laying *the lambs in his bosom, and gently leading those that are with young*.

5. I might farther argue this grace and tenderness of our Lord Jesus, "from the experience of those, who have been thus gathered, and cherished, and conducted by him."

This being a fact, ought certainly to have its weight; and how little soever it may be regarded by those who are strangers to it, yet to the happy soul who has found and felt this care, and with the most delightful relish *Tasted that the Lord is gracious*¶¶, it will be instead of ten thousand arguments. How many, when ready to sink under their sorrows and their fears, have *looked unto him, and been lightened****, have found their fears dispersed, and their hopes established, their strength renewed, and their

* Rev. ii. 4.
† Chap. iii 1.
‡ Chap. iii. 4.
§ Chap. iii. 8.
‖ Chap. iii. 15.
¶ Rev. ii. 5, 16. iii. 16.
** Chap. ii. 7.
†† Chap. iii. 5.
‡‡ Chap. iii. 21.
§§ Chap. ii. 10.
‖‖ Chap. iii. 10, 12.
¶¶ 1 Pet. ii. 3.
*** Psal. xxxiv. 5.

joys enkindled? The effect is real, evident, and frequent: And if we inquire into the immediate cause, we shall frequently find it to be the promises of his word, uttered by Christ himself, or recorded by such as had their instructions and authority from him. But if it be farther demanded, Whence it is, that the same promises do at some times impress the mind so much more powerfully than at others, though as distinctly remembered, and as firmly believed? I will venture to say, how enthusiastical soever some may imagine it, that the most natural reason seems to me to be this: The blessed Spirit of God, whose office it is to *Shew* to believers *the things of Christ**, does sometimes display the promises before their eyes with uncommon sweetness and energy, at the same time sealing to the soul its own interest in them; and from hence arises so sublime and so holy a joy and strength, that the christian observing its nature and tendency, cannot doubt its original. And I evidently see, and new instances of it are daily arising, that such secret communications from above are the most effectual support of many good men, under the greatest inward discouragements, and the most painful conflicts with their spiritual enemies. Now these supports being derived from the blessed Spirit, are to be considered as proceeding from Christ; since it is most evident from the whole tenor of scripture, that Christ is the great Head, from whom believers derive the influences of this Spirit, which are therefore called *The supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*†. So that every new instance of such refreshments and consolations as these, is an additional experimental proof of the tenderness and grace of a Redeemer.

Nor is there any just objection against it, arising from the many instances, in which he has permitted excellent persons to go on, for a considerable time, in the bitterness of their souls, without any sensible manifestations of his care and favour. We are to *Judge nothing before the time*‡; and surely the fidelity and kindness of the blessed Jesus is sufficiently approved, if, though in the most secret and imperceptible manner, he supports his people in the midst of their greatest difficulties, so as to prevent their being separated from him, till he safely conducts them to the heavenly world, and there shews them the reason of all their sorrows, and comforts them infinitely more than in proportion to them all. And that he does so, appears evident to me, not only from the promises and declarations of his word,

* John xvi. 14, 15. † Phil. i. 19. ‡ 1 Cor. iv. 5.

which have been referred to under the former head, but also from the observation of facts, as far as it is possible for a train of particular observations, to confirm such a general assertion.

I must here take the liberty to say, (because I think it my duty on this occasion publicly to testify it) that though for my age I have had a considerable opportunity of making my remarks on various cases of persons under spiritual distress, yet excepting a very few instances of evident distraction, which none can reasonably imagine to have affected their eternal state, I cannot recollect any single instance, in which the humble soul has seemed to be finally deserted by the great Shepherd. Many, who have been under strong convictions and agonies of mind, have, indeed, forgot their resolutions, taken up often in an apparent dependance on themselves, and have *Returned with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire**. Many who have talked loudly of their extraordinary communications from above, and despised others who have been less confident, have quickly appeared self-deceiving hypocrites, and have been left by foul miscarriages to bring a scandal on themselves, and on religion too. But I cannot remember, that I ever met with a single person, who appeared, as one of the lambs of Christ's flock, humble under a sense of sin, and cordially disposed to put himself under the care of Christ as the great Shepherd, who after seeking and waiting on him, has been either driven away by terror, or finally seduced into soul-ruining errors or crimes, even by the most artful deceivers. Many of them have perhaps for a considerable time gone on weeping and trembling; but they have kept their hold even to the last, and died with much more comfort than they lived. Others have, for a long course of after-life, found their consolations as great, as ever their sorrows had been: And after all their fears, many are to this day going on in a steady calm, as *Knowing whom they have believed*†; while others, who I doubt not are equally safe, are saying, If we perish, we will perish at his feet: But so far as I can recollect, I have never myself seen any of such a character, who have fallen into a final apostacy, or died in such circumstances, as to leave room to fear that their souls were lost; and I have heard of few cases, which bear such an appearance.——Let all these remarks and arguments be attentively considered, and then say, whether the grace and tenderness of a Redeemer be not as clearly proved, and as firmly

* 1 Pet. ii. 22. † 2 Tim. i. 12.

established, as even the lambs of his flock could reasonably desire. And now,

IV. Let me conclude the discourse, with hinting at the purposes to which it may be improved,

And surely the survey we have been taking of the tenderness of Christ as a Shepherd, may naturally lead us to some such reflections as these.

1. "How amiable does our blessed Redeemer appear, when we contemplate him under such a character!"

Such sentiments of humanity are wrought into our very natures, that we cannot but love any person, especially one of distinction, who condescends to the weak and the helpless, and tenderly accommodates himself to their necessities and distresses. You honour, and you love, a man of genius and learning and eminence in life, who will lay aside other more splendid employments, that he might instruct children, or by kind and affectionate converse, even with the poorest creature that applies to him, may ease the burdens of the sorrowful spirit. If a minister of such a character has been remarkable for his readiness to such services, and for his diligent and successful application to them, though it be plainly the peculiar duty of his office to abound in them, he is justly respected while he lives, and his name and memory are dear and precious to survivors: Yet this is only the condescension of one worm to another. How much more reason have we, to reverence and love the compassionate Jesus, the prince of glory, who has so long borne, and so tenderly and faithfully executed this kind office, and bears and executes it to this day! How many diseased souls has he healed, how many weak hands hath he strengthened, how many weeping eyes has he dried, how many trembling hearts has he supported and revived! Let our love and our praises ascend to this great common benefactor, for the share which others have had in his goodness.

But must the reflection stop here? Are not we ourselves in the number of those obliged creatures? And shall we not feel, and own the obligation?—We should surely be a burden to ourselves if we had no sense of the kindness of those, who supported us in our feeble infancy; who then bore us in their arms, and cherished us in their bosoms; who watched over our slippery steps, and added the more important care of forming our opening minds to knowledge and virtue. And when we have felt the burden of more advanced days pressing hard upon

us, and *Heaviness in our hearts has made them stoop** ; if some cordial sympathizing friend has gladdened them with *Good and comfortable words*† ; how kindly have we taken it, and how thankfully have we acknowledged it? But, oh blessed Jesus, what were the guides of our infancy, or what the companions and comforters of our more advanced years, in comparison of what thou hast been to us! "Whatsoever I now am," may the soul say, "if I am thine, I was once a helpless lamb in thy flock; and how much am I indebted to that pastoral care of thine, of which I have now been hearing? Hadst thou not pursued me in my wanderings, I had been utterly lost: Hadst thou not guarded me in thine arms, I had long since been devoured: Hadst thou not cherished me in thy bosom, my very heart had been broken. And to this very day, what were I without thy care and favour! Thus let us look back to *former days*, and the *years of* more *ancient times* ; and as God reminds his people, how he *Took them by their arms, and taught them to go*‡, as he mentions with an agreeable reflection *The kindness of their youth, and the love of their espousals*§, let us this day gratefully commemorate his kindness to us in our youth, and when our souls were first espoused to him.

2. How ready should we be, to imitate this amiable character of our Redeemer, and after his example, to shew a tender regard to the feeble of the flock!"

We who are ministers should especially do it, if we would approve our fidelity to the great Shepherd, and finally stand accepted in his sight. Observe, I intreat you, my younger brethren, for my relation to some of you, not only allows, but requires me, to speak with peculiar freedom to you, observe in how awful a manner the great God declares his displeasure against those shepherds who have neglected the care which I now recommend. *Behold, I am against the shepherds, saith the Lord*‖, i. e. as appears from the preceding verses, those shepherds, who had *Not strengthened the diseased, nor healed the sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought again what was driven away*¶ ; *I am against these shepherds, saith the Lord; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock.* Did God so severely censure the Jewish shepherds for their neglect; and will he not disown and condemn us, if under all the greater engagements of such a

* Prov. xii. 25. † Zech. i. 13. ‡ Hos. xi. 3. § Jer. ii. 2.
‖ Ezek. xxxiv. 10. ¶ Ver. 4.

dispensation as the gospel, and such an example as we have now been surveying, our flocks be neglected, or rather his flock committed to our care? If you fear God, or love the Lord Jesus Christ, *Feed his sheep, feed his lambs**.——Instruct children, though it be a difficult work, and may seem to ignorant and thoughtless people a mean work; yet do it, and you will probably find the comfort of it, even if they should die young, as they perhaps may; and much more, if you see these tender plants growing up as *Cedars in Lebanon*, and becoming *pillars in the house of our God*†.—Tenderly comfort mourning souls. Let them have free access to you at proper times; hear their story patiently, though it may be a very melancholy one; and though you have heard it over and over again, from others in the same circumstances, if not from themselves. Watch their tempers, observe the turn of their minds, and of their discourses; and endeavour to lay hold of some word of their own, that you may, if possible, graft comfort upon it. Mourn with them, while they mourn; and when your heart is impressed with their sorrowful case, go with them to the throne of grace, and spread it largely and particularly before the Lord, which you cannot so conveniently do in any other circumstance.—I know, there are a thousand gaieties of life, and amusements of literature, which make young persons, especially, averse to such work as this. But remember, you are ministers of Christ; and surely *The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord*‡. You would think very ill of the Shepherd, that was so charmed with the music of his pipe, as to forget his lambs, when they should be fed and tended. And I will venture to say, that as the case I recommend is very necessary in order to the success of your ministry, so it may be a means of improving both your gifts and graces, and of forming you to a spiritual and experimental strain of preaching; which is a much more valuable part of a minister's furniture, than classical or mathematical learning, or the critical study of the scripture itself; though all these are desirable in their places, because all may be useful towards making *The man of God perfect*§.

I would also from hence take occasion to address an exhortation to you, who are heads of families. To your more immediate and constant care the lambs of the flock are committed. Feed them diligently and affectionately. Without your concurrence, we cannot promise ourselves much from our

* John xxi. 15, 16. †Psal. xcii. 12. Rev. iii. 13. ‡ Mat. x. 24.
§ 2 Tim. iii. 17.

more public attempts. Attend therefore to the religious concerns of your children and servants; and do it with a gentleness suited to their age and circumstances. Frighten them not with a rigorous and austere severity; but, as St. Paul expresses it with regard to himself, be *Gentle among them, even as a nurse cherisheth her children**. In short, let us all *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*†; and let us candidly receive one another, *As* we hope that *Christ*, with all our infirmities, *hath received us*‡.

3. "What abundant encouragement is here for the feeblest soul, to commit itself to Christ!"

Let me now, on that encouragement, particularly address the exhortation to those, whose circumstances render it peculiarly their concern.

Let me address it to you, my younger friends, even to the children that hear me this day. We speak of the gentleness and goodness of Christ, on purpose to invite you to him. Go to him by faith and prayer, and say, "Blessed Jesus, I come to thee a poor weak tender creature; but it was in regard to such weakness, that thou hast been pleased to speak so graciously. I believe what I have heard, and I mean to venture my soul upon it. I flee to thee, as the helpless lamb to its shepherd, when hungry that he may feed it, when pursued by wild beasts, that he may defend it. Lord, open thine arms and thy bosom to me, though I am so inconsiderable a creature. *Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou ordainest praise*§. Fill my heart with thy love, and my mouth with thy praise, and lead me on, till I may come to praise thee amongst the angels in heaven, and to serve thee as they do."

Let me address the exhortation also to the tempted and sorrowful soul. *O thou afflicted*, thou who art *tossed with the tempest, and not comforted*‖! Look unto Jesus. Let thy conflicts and dangers drive thee to him, though Satan would thereby attempt to drive thee from him. Accustom not thyself, to think of Christ as dreadful and severe. Terrify not thyself with the thought of the iron rod of his vengeance, whilst thou feelest thyself disposed to submit to the golden sceptre of his grace, to the pastoral rod by which he guides his sheep. And when thou findest thy doubts arising, flee to the representations and assurances of his word, so largely insisted on above; and

* 1 Thess. ii. 7. † Gal. vi. 2. ‡ Rom. xv. 7.
§ Psal. viii. 2. Mat. xxi. 16. ‖ Isa. liv. 11.

pray, that the influences of his Spirit may strengthen thy faith in them.

Nor let me neglect so proper an occasion, of addressing myself to aged christians. You, my friends, though not the lambs of the flock, are, on some account, the feeble of it. Though I hope, and believe, that many of you are strong in grace; yet the outer man is decaying, and sensible comfort often decays with it. Yet be not discouraged, but remember your Shepherd. You have not only heard of his grace, but you have long experienced it. Be cheerful in it, and remember, that as all your experiences will not secure you otherwise than as in the bosom of Christ, so all your infirmities and trials cannot endanger you while you are there. He has led you on gently and safely through the wilderness; a few steps more will finish the journey, and bring you to the pastures of Canaan.

Once more, let me address the exhortation to those who have gone astray from this blessed Shepherd, and invite them to return to him. May I not appeal to your own consciences to witness, that it was never better with you, than when you kept nearest to him; and that while at a distance from him, you are exposed to want and danger, and bitter regret? Has not your heart melted within you, while I have been speaking? and have you not been ready to say, "Oh that I were once more lodged in those gracious arms, in that compassionate bosom." And what hinders it? Does he not assure you, that he will yet be willing to receive you? Nay, that he will yet rejoice over you on some accounts even more, than over those who never wandered*. Return then, in the strength of divine grace, to the duties you have neglected, to the ordinances you have forsaken; and may your souls find refreshment in them, that with firmer *Purpose of heart* you may for the future *cleave unto the Lord*†? And now,

Lastly, "What a delightful idea does it give us of the natural endearments, which shall pass between Christ and his people, when they are brought to the world of glory?"

There they shall be no longer exposed to necessities and alarms; but all the purposes of his love shall be completed, in their everlasting security and joy. And surely the gracious Redeemer must be inconceivably delighted, when he there sees of *The travail of his soul*‡. When he has with a gentle and

* Luke xv. 6, 7. † Acts xi. 23. ‡ Isa. liii. 11.

gracious hand conducted his sheep through the dark *valley of the shadow of death*, with what joy will he open to them those better pastures! With what congratulations will he receive them to a state of inseparable nearness to him, and *Administer unto them an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of their Lord and Saviour*!* Therefore it is beautifully represented in the book of the Revelation, as the business and joy of Christ, even on the throne of his glory, to lead on his saints to the various scenes of divine pleasure and enjoyment, which are provided for them there: *The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters*†.

And, oh gracious Redeemer, what will the joy of thy flock then be, when thus fed and conducted by thee! If it be so delightful, at this humble distance, to believe ourselves the objects of thy care and favour, and to taste of these little streams which thou art causing to flow in upon us here in the wilderness, what will that *river of life* be! If it be now the joy of our hearts, a while to forget our cares and our fears, when we are perhaps at thy table, and to lean our weary heads for a few moments on thy dear breast; what will it be, for ever to dwell in thine embrace, and to say once for all, *Return unto thy rest, oh my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee*‡! Bountifully indeed! when they, who were brought out *With weeping, and led* on *with supplications*§, *shall*, as *the redeemed of the Lord, come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*‖.

In the mean time, we *rejoice in hope* of this blessed scene, and would raise such feeble praises, as earth will admit, to this great Shepherd, whose arm is so strong to guard us; whose bosom is so soft to cherish us; and whose heart is so compassionate, notwithstanding all our unworthiness, as to exert that arm for our protection, and to open that bosom for our repose. *Amen.*

* 2 Pet. i. 11. † Rev. vii. 17. ‡ Psal. cxvi. 7.
§ Jer. xxxi. 9. ‖ Isa. xxxv. 10.

SERMON VIII.

POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST.

The Evidences of Christianity briefly stated, and the New Testament proved to be Genuine.

2 Pet. i. 16.——*We have not followed cunningly devised Fables.*——

IT is undoubtedly a glory to our age and country, that the nature of moral virtue has been so clearly stated, and the practice of it so strongly enforced, by the views of its native beauty, and beneficial consequences, both to private persons, and societies. Perhaps in this respect, hardly any nation or time has equalled, certainly few, if any, have exceeded our own. Yet I fear I might add, there have been few ages or countries, where vice has more generally triumphed, in its most audacious, and, in other respects, most odious forms.

This may well appear a surprising case; and it will surely be worth our while to enquire into the causes of so strange a circumstance. I cannot now enter into a particular detail of them. But I am persuaded, none is more considerable than that unhappy disregard, either to the gospel in general, or to its most peculiar and essential truths, which is so visible amongst us, and which appears to be continually growing. It is plain, that like some of old, who thought and professed themselves the wisest of mankind, or in other words the freest thinkers of their age, multitudes amongst us have *not liked to retain God* and his truths *in their knowledge:* And it is therefore the less to be wondered at, if *God has given them over to a reprobate mind*;* to the most infamous lusts, and enormities; and to a depth of degeneracy, which, while it is in part the natural consequence, is in part also the just, but dreadful punishment of their apostacy from the faith. And I am persuaded, that those who do indeed wish well to the cause of public virtue, as every true christian most certainly does, cannot serve it more

* Rom. i. 28.

effectually, than by endeavouring to establish men in the belief of the gospel in general, and to affect their hearts with its most distinguishing truths.

The latter of these is our frequent employment, and is what I have particularly been attempting in the preceding discourses on the Power and Grace of the Redeemer: The former I shall now, by the divine assistance, apply myself to, in those that follow. And I have chosen the words now before us, as a proper introduction to such a design.

They do indeed peculiarly refer to the coming of our Lord, which the apostle represents as attested by that glory, of which he was an eye-witness on the Mount of Transfiguration, and by that voice from heaven which he heard there: But the truth of these facts is evidently connected with that of the gospel, in general. I am persuaded therefore, you will think they are properly prefixed to a discourse on the general Evidences of Christianity. And I hope, by the divine assistance, to propose them at this time in such a manner, as shall convince you, that the apostles had reason to say, and that we also have reason to repeat it, *We have not followed cunningly devised fables**.

I have often touched on this subject occasionally, but I think it my duty at present to insist something more largely upon it. You easily apprehend, that it is a matter of the highest importance, being indeed no other than the great foundation of all our eternal hopes. While so many are daily attempting to destroy this foundation, it is possible, that those of you, especially, who are but entering on the world, may be called out *To give a reason of the hope that is in you*†. I would therefore, with the apostle, be concerned, that you may *be ready* to do it. It may fortify you against the artifices, by which the unwary are often deceived and ensnared, and may possibly enable you to *Put to silence their foolishness*‡. At least it will be for the satisfaction of your own minds, to have considered the matter seriously, and to be conscious to yourselves, that you are not christians merely by education, or example, as, had you been born elsewhere, you might have been Pagans or Mahometans; but that you are so upon rational evidence, and because, as the sacred historian expresses it, you *Know the certainty of those things in which you have been instructed*§.

To open and vindicate the proof of christianity in all its extent, would be the employment of many discourses; nor would it, on the whole, be proper to attempt it here. All that

* 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18. † 1 Pet. iii. 15. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 15. § Luke i. 4.

I now intend here is, to give you a summary view of the most considerable arguments, in that which seems to me their most proper and natural connection; that so you may be able to judge of them better, than you could possibly do by a few scattered remarks, or by the most copious enlargement on any single branch of them alone. I shall endeavour to dispose these hints so, as that they may be some guide to those, whose leisure and abilities may lead them to a more ample and curious enquiry; that they may not be intangled in so complex an argument, but may proceed in an orderly manner. And if any of you, my friends, desire a more particular information on any of those heads, which I now but briefly suggest, you may depend upon it, that faithful ministers of every denomination will think it an important part of their duty, to give you all the private assistance they can. It is my hearty prayer, that God would enable me to plead his cause with success; that he would open your understandings to receive these things, and strengthen your memories to retain them; that you may not be *Like children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive**; but may be *Strong in faith, giving glory to God*†; that, your faith being more and more established, it may appear, that the tree is watered at the roots; and all your other graces may grow and flourish, in an equal proportion.

But before I proceed, I must desire you to observe, that there is no proof in the world so satisfactory to the true christian, as to have felt the transforming power of the gospel on his own soul. As that illiterate man whose eyes were miraculously opened by Christ, when he was questioned by the Jewish Sanhedrim, who endeavoured with all their sophistry to prove Christ an impostor, answered with great steadiness and constancy, and with a great deal of reason too, this *One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see*‡: So the most unlearned of the disciples of Jesus, having found his soul enlightened and sanctified, and felt his heart so effectually wrought upon, as to bring him home to his duty, his God, and his happiness, by the constraining power of the gospel, will despise a thousand subtle objections which may be urged against it: And though *The cross of Christ be to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*, yet with this experience of its saving energy, he will honour it in the midst of all their contempt and ridicule, as *the power of God, and the wisdom of God*§. In this sense,

* Eph. iv. 14. † Rom. iv. 20. ‡ John ix. 25. § 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

though the miraculous communication of the Spirit, be ceased, *He that believes, hath* still *the witness in himself**; and while *The Spirit beareth witness with his Spirit, that he is a child of God*†, he cannot doubt, but that *The word by which he was*, as it were, *begotten* unto him, is indeed a divine and *incorruptible seed*‡. And perhaps, there are certain seasons of pressing temptation, in which the most learned, as well as the most illiterate christian, will find this the surest *anchor of his hope*.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged, that this glorious kind of evidence, is like the white stone, mentioned in the Revelation, in which there was *A new name written, which no man knew, but he who received it*§. God has therefore made other provision for the honour and support of his gospel, by furnishing it with a variety of proof, which may with undiminished, and indeed with growing conviction, be communicated from one to another. And we should be greatly wanting in gratitude to him, in zeal for a Redeemer's kingdom, and in charitable concern for the conversion of those who reject the gospel, as well as for the edification of those who embrace it, should we wholly overlook these arguments, or neglect to acquaint ourselves with them. This is the evidence, which I am now to propose; and I desire you would hear it with a becoming attention. I speak to you, as to rational creatures: Judge ye of the reasonableness of what I shall say.

In prosecution of this great design, I shall endeavour more particularly to shew you,——that if we take the matter on a general survey, it will appear highly probable, that such a scheme of doctrines and precepts, as we find christianity to be, should indeed have been a divine revelation;——and then, that if we examine into the external evidence of it, we shall find it certain in fact, that it was so, and that it had its original from above.

First, Let me shew, "that taking the matter merely in theory, it will appear highly probable, that such a system as the gospel should be indeed a divine revelation."

To evidence this, I would more particularly prove,—that the state of mankind was such, as greatly to need a revelation;—that there seems from the light of nature, encouragement to hope that God should grant one;——that it is reasonable to believe, if any were made, it should be so introduced and transmitted, as we are told christianity was; and that its general nature and substance should be such, as we find that of the gospel

* 1 John v. 10. † Rom. viii. 16. ‡ James i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 23. § Rev. ii. 17.

is. If these particulars are made out, here will be a strong presumptive evidence, that the gospel is from God; and we shall have opened a fair way toward that more direct proof, which I principally intend.

1. The case of mankind is naturally such, as greatly to need a divine revelation."

I speak not here of man in his original state; though even then, as many have largely shewn, some instruction from above seemed necessary to inform him of many particulars, which it was highly expedient that he should immediately know: But I speak of him in the degenerate condition in which he now so evidently lies, by whatever means he was brought into it. It is an easy thing to make florid encomiums on the perfection of natural light, and to deceive unwary readers with an ambiguous term*, which shall sometimes signify all that appears even to the divine understanding, and sometimes no more than the meanest of the human race may, or than they actually do attain; but let fact speak, and the controversy will soon be determined. I appeal to all, that are acquainted with the records of antiquity, or that have any knowledge of the most credible accounts of the present state of those countries where christianity is unknown, whether it is not too obvious a truth, that *The whole* heathen *world* has lain, and still *lies in wickedness*†. Have not incomparably the greater part of them been perpetually bewildered in their religious notions and practices, vastly differing from each other, and almost equally differing on all sides from the probable appearances of truth and reason? Is any thing so wild as not to have been believed, any thing so infamous as not to have been practised by them, while they have not only pretended to justify it by reason, but have consecrated it as a part of their religion? To this very day, what are the discoveries of new nations in the American or African world, but generally speaking, the opening of new scenes of enormity? Rapine, lust, cruelty, human sacrifices, and the most stupid idolatries, are, and for ought I can find, always have been, the morality and religion of almost all the Pagan nations under heaven: And to say, that there have still been some smothered sparks of reason within, which, if cherished, might have led them to truth and happiness, is only saying, that they have been so much the more criminal, and therefore so much the more miserable.

* This Dr. Tyndal has done in so gross and palpable a manner, that it is surprising that fallacy alone should not have exposed his christianity as old as the creation, to the immediate contempt of every intelligent reader.

† 1 John v. 19.

But you live at home, and hear these things only by uncertain report. Look then around you within the sphere of your own observation, and see the temper and character of the generality of those, who have been educated in a christian, and even in a protestant country. Observe their ignorance and forgetfulness of the Divine Being, their impieties, their debaucheries, their fraud, their oppression, their pride, their avarice, their ambition, their unnatural insensibility of the wants and sorrows and interests of each other; and when you see how bad they generally are in the midst of so many advantages, judge by that of the probable state of those that want them. Judge upon these views, whether a revelation be an unnecessary thing.

2. "There is, from the light of nature, considerable encouragement to hope, that God would favour his creatures with so needful a blessing as a revelation appears."

That a revelation is in itself a possible thing, is evident beyond all shadow of a doubt. Shall not *He that made man's mouth**, who has given us this wonderful faculty of discovering our sentiments, and communicating our ideas to each other, shall not he be able to converse with his rational creatures, and by sensible manifestations, or by inward impressions, to convey the knowledge of things, which lie beyond the ken of their natural faculties, and yet may be highly conducive to their advantage? To own a God, and to deny him such a power, will be a notorious contradiction.——But it may appear much more dubious, whether he will please to confer such a favour on sinful creatures.

Now I acknowledge, that we could not certainly conclude he would ever do it; considering on the one hand, how justly they stood exposed to his final displeasure; and on the other, what provision he had made by the frame of the human mind, and of nature around us, for giving us such notices of himself, as would leave us *Inexcusable*, if we either failed *to know him*, or *to glorify him as God*, as the apostle argues at large†. Nevertheless methinks, we should have had something of this kind to hope, from considering God as the indulgent Father of his creatures; from observing the tender care which he takes of us, and the liberal supply which he grants for the support of the animal life; especially, from the provision which he has made for man, considered as a guilty and calamitous creature, by the medicinal and healing virtues which he has given to many of the productions of nature, which in a state of perfect rectitude and

* Exod. iv. 11. † Rom. i. 20, and seq.

happiness man would never have needed. This is a circumstance, which seemed strongly to intimate, that he would some time or another graciously provide some remedy to heal men's minds; and that he would interpose to instruct them, in his own nature, in the manner in which he is to be served, and in the final treatment which they may expect from him. And I think, such an apprehension seems very congruous to the sentiments of the generality of mankind; as appears from the many pretences to divine revelation which have often been made, and the readiness of multitudes to receive them on very slender proofs: This shews how naturally men expect some such kind interposition of the Deity: A thought, which might farther be confirmed by some remarkable passages of heathen writers, which I have not now time particularly to mention.

3. We may easily conclude, "that if a revelation were given, it would be introduced and transmitted in such a manner, as christianity is said to have been."

It is exceeding probable, for instance, that it should be taught, either by some illustrious person sent down from a superior world, or at least by a man of eminent wisdom and piety, who should himself have been, not only a teacher, but an example, of universal goodness. In order to this it seems probable, that he would be led through a series of calamity and distress; since otherwise he would not have been a pattern of the virtues, which adorn adversity, and are peculiar to it. And it might also have been expected, that in the extremity of his distress, the blessed God, whose messenger he was, should, in some extraordinary manner, have interposed, either to preserve, or to recover him from death.

It is moreover exceeding probable that such a person, and perhaps also they who were at first employed as his messengers to the world, should be endowed with a power of working miracles; both to awaken men's attention, and to prove a divine mission, and the consequent truth of their doctrines; some of which, might, perhaps, not be capable of any other kind of proof; or if they were, it is certain that no method of arguing is so short, so plain, and so forcible, and on the whole, so well suited to the conviction, and probably the reformation of mankind, as a course of evident, repeated, and uncontrouled miracles. And such a method of proof is especially adapted to the populace, who are incomparably the greater part of mankind, and for whose benefit, we may assure ourselves, a revelation

would chiefly be designed.—I might add, it was no way improbable, though not in itself certain, that a dispensation should open gradually on the world; and that the most illustrious messenger of God to men should be ushered in by some predictions, which should raise a great expectation of his appearance, and have an evident accomplishment in him.

As for the propagation of a religion so introduced, it seems no way improbable, that having been thus established in its first age, it should be transmitted to future generations by credible testimony, as other important facts are. It is certain, that affairs of the utmost moment, which are transacted amongst men, depend on testimony: On this voyages are undertaken, settlements made, and controversies decided; controversies, on which not only the estates, but the lives of men depend. And though it must be owned, that such an historical evidence is not equally convincing with miracles which are wrought before our own eyes; yet it is certain, it may rise to such a degree as to exclude all reasonable doubt. And I know not why we should expect, that the evidence of a revelation should be such, as universally to compel the immediate assistance of all to whom it is offered. To me it seems much more likely, that it should be so adjusted, as to be a kind of touchstone to the tempers and characters of men; capable indeed of giving ample satisfaction to the diligent and candid enquirer, yet attended with some circumstances, from whence the captious and perverse might take occasion to cavil and object. Such might we suppose the evidence of the revelation would be, and such it is maintained, that of christianity is. The teachers of it say, and undertake to prove, that it was thus introduced, thus established, and thus transmitted; and we trust, that this is a strong presumption in its favour; especially as we can add,

4. "That the main doctrines contained in the gospel are of such a nature, as we might in general suppose, those of a divine revelation would be, rational, practical, and sublime."

One would imagine, that in a revelation of a religion from God, the great principles of natural religion should be clearly asserted, and strongly maintained: Such I mean, as the existence*, the unity†, the perfection‡, and the providence of God§; the essential and immutable difference between moral good and evil ‖; the obligation we are under to the various branches

* Heb. xi. 6. † Mark xii. 29. 1 Tim. ii. 5. ‡ Mat. v. 48.
§ Mat. x. 29, 30. ‖ Isa. v. 20. 2 Cor. vi. 14.

of virtue, whether human, social, or divine*; the value and immortality of the soul†; and the rewards and punishments of a future state ‡. One would easily conclude, that all these particulars must be contained in it; and that upon the whole, it should appear calculated, to form men's minds to a proper temper, rather than to amuse them with curious speculations.

It might indeed be farther supposed, and probably concluded, that such a revelation would contain some things, which could not have been learnt from the highest improvements of natural light: And considering the infinite and unfathomable nature of the blessed God, it would be more than probable, that many things might be hinted at, and referred to, which our feeble faculties should not be able fully to comprehend. Yet we should expect, to find these introduced in a practical view, as directing us to duties before unknown, or suggesting powerful motives to make us resolute and constant in the discharge of the rest§. As for ceremonial and positive institutions, we should imagine, at least in the most perfect state of the revelation, that they should be but few, and those few plainly subservient to the great purposes of practical religion.

I shall only add, that forasmuch as pride appears to be the most reigning corruption of the human mind, and the source of numberless irregularities; it is exceeding probable, that a divine revelation should be calculated, to humble the fallen creature, and bring it to a sense of his guilt and weakness; and the more evidently that tendency appears, other things being equal, the greater reason there is to believe, that the orginal of such a scheme is from above.

Your own thoughts have undoubtedly prevented me in the application of these characters to the christian revelation. The justice of that application I must now illustrate at large. But I must beg leave to advance one remark, which will conclude what I have to say on this general: Which is, that as the christian system is undoubtedly worthy of God, so considering the manner in which it is said to have been introduced, separate from the evidence of these facts, which is afterwards to be considered, it is extremely difficult to imagine, from whom else it could have proceeded.

I will readily allow, that neither the reasonableness of its

* Mat. xxii. 37, 39. Phil. iv. 8. Tit. ii. 12. † Mat. x. 28. xvi. 26.

‡ Rom. ii. 6—10. Mat. xxv. 46.

§ Particularly on what terms, and to what degree, pardon and happiness might be expected by sinful creatures.

doctrines, nor the purity of its morals, will alone prove its divine original; since it is possible, the reason of one man may discover that, which the reason of another approves, as being, itself considered, either true in theory, or useful in practice. But this is not all; for in the present case it is evident, that the first teachers of christianity professed, that they were taught it by divine revelation, and that they were empowered by God with miraculous endowments for the confirmation of it. Now if it were not indeed so as they professed, how can we account for so strange a phænomenon, as such a doctrine introduced with such pretences? If it were not from God, whence was it? From good, or from evil angels, or men? Wicked creatures, as our Lord stongly intimates*, would never contrive and propagate so excellent a scheme; nor can we imagine, that holy angels, or righteous men would thus be *Found false witnesses of God*†, or have attempted to support the cause of religion and truth, by such impious and notorious falsehoods, as their pretensions must have been, if they were falsehoods at all.

And thus much for the first branch of the argument: If you consider the christian scheme only in theory, it appears highly probable; since a revelation was so much needed, might so reasonably be expected, and if it were ever given, would, so far as we can judge, be thus introduced, and be in the main attended with such internal characters. And though we have not as yet expressly proved, that the gospel was introduced in such a manner, as the defenders of it assert; yet it would be strangely unaccountable, that so admirable a system of truth and duty should be advanced by the prince of darkness, and the children of wickedness; as it must have been, if the persons first employed in the propagation of it were not *Endowed with power from on high*‡.

To embrace the gospel is so safe, and on the whole, so comfortable a thing, that I think a wise man would deliberately and resolutely venture his all upon it, though nothing more could be offered for its confirmation. But, blessed be God, we have a great deal more to offer in this important cause; and can add, with greater confidence, that it is not only in theory thus probable, but,

Secondly, "That it is in fact certain, that christianity is indeed a divine revelation."

Here I confess the chief stress is to be laid; and therefore

* Mat. xii. 25—29. † 1 Cor. xv. 15. ‡ Luke xxiv. 49.

I shall insist more largely on this branch of the argument, and endeavour, by the divine assistance, to prove the certainty of this great fact. You will naturally apprehend, that I speak only of what is commonly called a moral certainty*: But I need speak of no more; for in many cases, such kind of evidence gives the mind as ample, and as rational a satisfaction, as it may find even in some supposed mathematical demonstration; since there it is possible, at least in a long deduction of particulars, for the most sagacious of mankind to fall into a mistake.

Now in order to settle this grand point as clearly as I can, I think it may be proper to prove,

I. That the books of the New Testament, as they are now in your hands, may be depended upon as written by the first preachers and publishers of christianity. And,

II. That from hence it will certainly follow, that what they assert is true, and that the religion they teach, brings along with it such evidences of a divine authority, as may most justly recommend it to our acceptance.

Each of these heads might furnish out matter for many volumes; but it is my business to hint at the most obvious and important thoughts, by which they may briefly be illustrated and confirmed.

I. I am to prove to you, "That the books of the New Testament, now in your hands, were written by the first preachers and publishers of christianity."

You see I confine the present proof, to the books of the New Testament. Not that I think the authority of the Old to be suspected, or the use of it by any means to be despised. God forbid! It is an invaluable treasure, which demands our daily delightful and thankful perusal, and is capable of being defended in a manner, which I am persuaded its subtlest enemies will never be able to answer. But the nature of my present argument, and the limits of my time, oblige me at present to wave the proof of it, any farther than as it is implied in, and dependant upon, what I have more immediately in view.

In the process of the discourse, though I shall studiously avoid any ostentation of learning, yet it will be absolutely necessary to assert some things, which cannot certainly be known, with-

* Which, though it amount not to strict demonstration, is such kind of evidence as suits past matters of fact, and is sufficient to make a candid and rational enquirer easy in his assent.

out some little acquaintance with ancient writers. You cannot, most of you, be supposed to have formed such an acquaintance; but I take it for granted you will readily believe, that I will not *Lie for God nor talk deceitfully for him**. I shall say nothing of this kind, but what I know to be contained in those writings; and you may assure yourselves, that no man of common sense, whatever his moral or religious character were, would venture in such an age as this, publicly to cite passages, as from authors in every ones hands, which he cannot prove to be contained in them.

Having premised these things, I go on to the argument, and shall advance in it by the following degrees. I shall prove,——that christianity is an ancient religion;——that there was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, crucified at Jerusalem about seventeen hundred years ago;——that the first preachers of his religion wrote books, which went by the name of those, that now make up the volume of our New Testament;——that they are preserved in the original to the present times;——and that the translation of them, which you have, is in the main such, as may be depended upon as faithful. And then I shall have clearly made out what I proposed in this first part.

1. It is certain, "that christianity is not a new religion, but that it was maintained by great multitudes, quickly after the time in which Jesus is said to have appeared."

That there was, considerably more than sixteen hundred years ago, a body of men, who went by the name of christians, is almost as evident, as that a race of men was then existing in the world; nor do I know, that any have ever been wild and confident enough to dispute it. If any should for argument sake question it, they might quickly be convinced by a considerable number of christian writers, who lived in the same, or the next age†, and mention it as a thing notoriously certain, that christianity was then of some standing in the world; some of them giving directions and exhortations to their brethren, and others forming apologies, to their enemies, for which there could not otherwise have been the least foundation. We might have acquiesced in their testimony, had it been alone; but it is confirm-

* Job xiii. 7.

† Such as Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tatian, Athenagoras, and Theophilus Antiochenus, who all wrote before the year 200, and some in the first century: Not to urge Barnabas, and Hermas; nor to mention any of those cited by Eusebius, whose books are all lost, except some fragments, preserved chiefly by that excellent writer.

ed by that of Jews and heathens, who, by their early invectives against the christians, do most evidently prove, that there was such a body of men in the world.——The most considerable Roman historians, who lived in this age, and wrote of it, are Tacitus and Suetonius, who both published their writings above sixteen hundred years ago, and they are always and very justly appealed to, as pregnant witnesses upon this occasion.—For Tacitus assures us, "that in Nero's days," who begun his reign about twenty years after the death of Christ, "there was a vast multitude of christians, not only in Judea, but at Rome too; against whom Nero raised a persecution, attended with such circumstances of ignominy and cruelty, as moved the compassion even of their enemies;" of which number this historian evidently was*. Nay he plainly intimates, that this was not the first attempt which had been made to crush them; though this attempt was so early as we have heard.——His contemporary Suetonius, in his more concise manner, attests the same†.—And Pliny, the intimate friend and correspondent of both, being employed in Trajan's time to persecute the christians, writes an account of them to that emperor, which though commonly known, must be mentioned as it is so highly important. After having spoken very favourably of their moral character, he adds, "That many of both sexes, and of every age and rank, were infected with this superstition;" as he thinks fit to express it; that it was gone into the villages, as well as the cities; and that, till he begun to put the laws in execution against them, the temples of the heathen deities were almost deserted, and hardly any could be found who would buy victims for them‡." It might be added, that Marcus Antoninus§,

* Nero quæsitissimis pœnis affecit, quos, per flagitia invisos, vulgus christianos appellabat— Repressa in præsens exitiabilis superstitio, rursus erumpebat, non modo per Judæam, originem ejus mali, sed per urbem etiam, &c.—Multitudo ingens— Odio humani generis convicti sunt; & pereuntibus addita ludibria,—unde miseratio oriebatur, &c. Tacit. Annal. Lib. xv. c. 44.

† Afflicti suppliciis christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novæ ac maleficæ. Sueton. Ner. cap. xvi.

‡ Multi omnis ætatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque sexus etiam vocantur in periculum. Neque civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam, atquæ agros, superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est;—prope jam desolata templa,—& sacra solennia diu intermissa: ——Victimas, quarum adhuc rarissimus Emptor inveniebatur. Plin. Epist. Lib. x. Epist. 97.

§ Ετοιμος απολυθηναι του σωματος μη κατα φιλην παραταξιν, ως οι Χριστιανοι. Marc. Antonin. Lib. xi. § 3.—See also this Emperor's Constitution to the Community of Asia (as inserted by Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History, Lib.

who wrote a few years after Pliny, mentions the christians, "as examples of a resolute and obstinate contempt of death:" And it is generally supposed, they are the Galileans, whom Epictetus speaks of*, "as those whom practice had taught to despise the rage of their armed enemies†."

I shall dismiss this head with observing, that it tends greatly to the confirmation of christianity, that each of these celebrated and ancient Pagan writers, at the same time they attest the existence of such a body of men professing it, inform us of those extreme persecutions which they underwent, in the very infancy of their religion; a fact also farther apparent from the apologies addressed by the christians to their persecutors, which whatever imperfections may attend the manner in which some of them are writ, appear to me some of the most valuable remains of antiquity, the Sacred Records only excepted, especially those of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Minutius Fælix.—This fundamental point is then abundantly made out; that there were vast numbers of men, very quickly after the time when Jesus is said to have appeared upon earth, who professed his religion, and chose to endure the greatest extremities, rather than they would abandon it. From hence it will be easy to shew,

2. "That there was certainly such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified at Jerusalem, when Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor there."

It can never be imagined, that multitudes of people should take their name from Christ, and sacrifice their lives for their adherence to him, even in the same age in which he is said to

iv. cap. 13.) in which he mentions their persecuting the christians to death; τους Χριστιανους διωκετε εως θανατου· and speaks of these persecutions as having continued a considerable time. N. B. This was inserted in Melito's Apology for the Christians, which he wrote in that Emperor's reign, so that there cannot be the least doubt of its being genuine.

* Υπο μανιας μεν δυναται τις ετο διατεθηναι τοιουτον ταυτα (δαρυφορους scil. η μαχαιρας) και υπο εθους οι Γαλιλαιοι. Arrian. Epictet. Lib. iv. cap. 7. p. 400.

† This would be the proper place to mention the passage said to be in Philo Judæus, (who was contemporary with the apostles,) relating to the christians in his days, and the methods taken by an Embassy from Jerusalem to prevent the progress of their religion: But though I verily believe the fact to have been true, I omit it, for reasons which the reader will find in a note under head 3. of the next sermon. —Some other passages of ancient writers, which might be very pertinent here, I reserve to mention under some following heads, and particularly where I shall speak of the Miraculous Propagation of the Gospel, in Sermon X.

have lived, if they had not been well assured, there was such a person. Now several of the authors I have mentioned plainly assert, that the christians were denominated from Christ; nay, Tacitus expressly adds, "that he was put to death under Pontius Pilate, who was procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius*." And it is well known, that the primitive christian apologists often appeal to the acts of Pilate†, or the memoirs of his government, which he, according to the custom of other procurators, transmitted to Rome, as containing an account of these transactions: And as the appeal was made to those, who had the command of the public records, we may assure ourselves such testimonies were then extant. But it is a fact which our enemies never denied; they owned it, they even gloried in it, and upbraided the christians with it. The Jews therefore in some of their earliest writings since those times, call Jesus by the ignominious name of "the Man who was hanged, or crucified," and his followers, "the servants of the crucified Person‡." And Lucien rallies them for deserting the pompous train of the heathen deities, to worship one whom he impiously calls "a crucified Impostor§."—Spartian also assures us, that the emperor Alexander Severus entertained such high thoughts of Christ, "that he would have admitted him into the number of his deities, and have built a temple to him, had not his Pagan subjects vigorously opposed it‖." And Porphyry, though an inveterate enemy to christianity, not only allowed there was such a Person, "but honoured him" as a most wise and pious Man, approved by the Gods, and taken up to heaven for his distinguished virtues¶."——I might add a great deal more on

* Auctor nominis ejus Christus, qui Tiberio imperitante per Procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus erat. Tacit. ubi supra.

† Vid. Justin. Mart. Apolog. Oper. page 76. & Tertul. Apolog. cap. xxi.

‡ Buxtorf. Lexic. Talmud. in Voce תלוי

§ Τον δε ανεστκολοπισμενον εκεινον σοφιστην αυτον προκυνωσι. Lucian de Morte Peregrini, Oper. Tom. II. page 568. I might here introduce a great many other remarkable particulars from this writer, which relate to "the fortitude of the christians in bearing sufferings, their entire submission to the authority of Jesus, their unparalelled charity to each other, the prophets and messengers of their churches, and the great progress of their religion." All these things are mentioned in the Pseudomantis, and the death of Peregrinus, which are undoubtedly Lucian's: Not to mention those very memorable passages in the Philopatris, which is of a much later date. But a particular detail of these things would swell this note to a very improper bulk.

‖ Spartian. de Vita Severi, cap. xxix. & xliii.

¶ Euseb. Demonstr. Evang. Lib. iii. page 134.

this head* ; but it already appears as certain as ancient history can make it, and incomparably more certain than most of the facts which it has transmitted to us, that there was at the time commonly supposed such a Person as Christ, who professed himself a divine Teacher, and who gathered many disciples, by whom his religion was afterwards published in the world.

3. It is also certain, " that the first publishers of this religion wrote books, which contained an account of the life and doctrine of Jesus their Master, and which went by the name of those that now make up our New Testament."

It was in the nature of things exceeding probable, that what they had *seen and heard*, they would *declare* and publish to the world in writing† ; considering, how common books were in the age and countries in which they taught ; and of how great importance an acquaintance with the history and doctrine of Christ was, to the purposes which they so strenuously pursued : But we have much more than such a presumptive evidence.

The greatest adversaries of christianity must grant, that we have books of great antiquity, written some fourteen, others fifteen, and some sixteen hundred years ago‡ ; in which mention is made of the life of Christ, as written by many, and especially by four of his disciples, who by way of eminence are called the Evangelists Great pains indeed have been taken to prove, that some spurious pieces were published under the names of the apostles, containing the history of these things : But surely this must imply, that it was a thing known and allowed, that the apostles did write some narrations of this kind ; as counterfeit coin implies some true money, which it is designed to represent. And I am sure, he must be very little acquainted with the ancient ecclesiastical writers, who does not know, that the primitive christians made a very great difference between those writings which we call the canonical books of the New

* I say nothing of the celebrated passage in Josephus, (Antiq. Lib. xviii. cap. 4.) because it has been disputed; though I know no considerable objection against it, but its being so honourable to christianity, that one would hardly imagine a Jew could write it.

† 1 John i 3.

‡ Such as Tatian, Irenæus, Tertullian, Clement Alexandrinus, Origen, Eusebius, and many others: See Jones on the Canon, part iv. introduct. Justin Martyr's Controversy with Trypho, and Origen's with Celsus, prove that Jews and heathens allowed, not only that there were such books, but that they contained the religion of christians.

Testament, and others; which plainly shews, that they did not judge of writings, merely by the names of their pretended authors, but enquired with an accuracy becoming the importance of those pretences. The result of this enquiry was, that the four Gospels, the Acts, thirteen epistles of Paul, one of Peter, and one of John, were received upon such evidence, that Eusebius, a most accurate and early critic in these things, could not learn that they had ever been disputed*: And afterwards the remaining books of the New Testament, Hebrews, James, the second of Peter, the second and third of John, Jude, and the Revelation, were admitted as genuine, and added to the rest; though some circumstances attending them, rendered their authority for a while a little dubious. On the whole it is plain, the primitive christians were so satisfied in the authority of these sacred books, that they speak of them, not only as credible and authentic, but as equal to the oracles of the Old Testament, as divinely inspired, as the words of the Spirit, as the law and organ of God, and as the rule of faith, which cannot be contradicted without great guilt; with many other expressions of the like kind, which often occur in their discourses. To which I may add, that in some of their councils, the New Testament was placed on a throne to signify their concern, that all their controversies and actions might be determined and regulated by it.

On the whole then, you see, that the primitive church did receive certain pieces, which bore the same titles with the books of our New Testament. Now I think it is evident, they were as capable of judging whether a book was written by Matthew, John, or Paul, as an ancient Roman could be of determining whether Horace, Tully, or Livy, wrote those which go under their names. And I am sure, the interest of the former was so much more concerned in the writings of the apostles, than that of the latter in the compositions of the poets, orators, or even their historians; that there is reason to believe, they would take much greater care to inform themselves fully in the merits of the cause, and to avoid being imposed upon by artifice and fiction. Let me now shew,

4. "That the books of the New Testament have been preserved in the main uncorrupted, to the present time, in the original language in which they were written."

This is a matter of vast importance, and blessed be God,

* Euseb. Eccles. Hist. lib. vi. cap. 25.

it is attended with proportionable evidence; an evidence, in which the hand of providence has indeed been remarkably seen; for I am confident, that there is no other ancient book in the world, which may so certainly and so easily, be proved to be authentic.

And here, I will not argue merely from the piety of the primitive christians, and the heroic resolution with which they chose to endure the greatest extremities, rather than they would deliver up their bibles, though that be a consideration of some evident weight; but shall intreat you to consider the utter impossibility of corrupting them. From the first ages, they were received, and read in the churches, as a part of their public worship, just as Moses and the Prophets were in the jewish synagogues; they were presently spread far and wide, as the boundaries of the church were increased; they were early translated into other languages, of which translations some remain to this day. Now when this was the case, how could they possibly be adulterated? Is it a thing to be supposed, or imagined, that thousands and millions of people should have come together from distant countries; and that, with all their diversities of language, and customs, and I may add, of sentiments too, they should have agreed on corrupting a book, which they all acknowledged to be the rule of their faith, and their manners, and the great charter by which they held their eternal hopes. It were madness to believe it: Especially when we consider what numbers of heretics appeared in the very infancy of the church, who all pretended to build their notions on scripture, and most of them appealed to it as the final judge of controversies; now it is certain, that these different parties of professing christians were a perpetual guard upon each other, and rendered it impossible for one party, to practice grossly on the sacred books, without the discovery, and the clamour of the rest.

Nor must I omit to remind you, that in every age, from the apostles' time to our own, there have been numberless quotations made from the books of the New Testament; and a multitude of commentaries in various languages, and some of very ancient date, have been written upon them: So that if the books themselves were lost, I believe they might in great measure, if not entirely, be recovered from the writings of others. And one might venture to say, that if all the quotations, which have ever been made from all the ancient writings now remaining in Europe, were to be amassed together, the bulk of them would be by no means comparable, to that of the quotations taken from the New Testament alone. So that a man might with a much

better face dispute, whether the writings ascribed to Homer, Demosthenes, Virgil, or Cæsar, be in the main such as they left them, than he could question it concerning those of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, and Paul, whether they are in the main so.

I say, in the main, because we readily allow, that the hand of a printer, or of a transcriber, might chance in some places to insert one letter or word for another, and the various readings of this, as well as of all other ancient books, prove, that this has sometimes been the case. Nevertheless those various readings are generally of so little importance, that he who can urge them as an objection against the assertion we are now maintaining, must have little judgment, or little integrity; and indeed, after those excellent things which have been said on the subject by many defenders of christianity, if he have read their writings, he must have little modesty too.

Since then it appears, that the books of the New Testament, as they now stand in the original, are, without any material alteration, such as they were, when they came from the hands of the persons whose names they bear, nothing remains to complete this part of the argument, but to shew,

5. "That the translation of them, now in your hands, may be depended upon, as in all things most material, agreeable to the original."

This is a fact, of which the generality of you are not capable of judging immediately, yet it is a matter of great importance: It is therefore a very great pleasure to me to think, what ample evidence you may find another way, to make your minds as easy on this head, as you could reasonably wish them. I mean, by the concurrent testimony of others, in circumstances in which you cannot imagine they would unite to deceive you.

There are, to be sure, very few of us, whose office it is publicly to preach the gospel, who have not examined this matter with care, and who are not capable of judging in so easy a case. I believe you have seen few in the place where I now stand, that could not have told you, as I now solemnly do, that, on a diligent comparison of our translation with the original, we find that of the New Testament, and I might also add, that of the Old, in the main faithful and judicious. You know indeed, that we do not scruple on some occasions to animadvert upon it; but you also know, that these remarks affect not the fundamentals of religion, and seldom reach any farther than the beauty of a figure, or at most the connection of an argument. Nay, I can

confidently say, that, to the best of my knowledge and remembrance, as there is no copy of the greek, so neither is there any translation of the New Testament which I have seen, whether ancient or modern, how defective and faulty soever, from which all the principal facts and doctrines of christianity might not be learnt, so far as the knowledge of them is necessary to salvation, or even to some considerable degrees of edification in piety. Nor do I except from this remark, even that most erroneous and corrupt version, published by the English jesuits at Rheims, which is undoubtedly one of the worst that ever appeared in our language.

But I desire not, that with respect to our own translation of the New Testament, a matter of so great moment as the fidelity of it should rest on my testimony alone, or entirely on that of any of my brethren, for whose integrity and learning you may have the greatest and justest esteem. I rejoice to say, that this is a head, on which we cannot possibly deceive you, if we were ever so desirous to do it. And indeed in this respect, that is our advantage, which in others is our great calamity, I mean the diversity of our religious opinions. It is certain, that wheresoever there is a body of dissenters from the public establishment, who do yet agree with their brethren of that establishment in the use of the same translation, though they are capable of examining it, and judging of it; there is as great evidence as could reasonably be desired, that such a translation is in the main right; for if it were in any considerable argument corrupted, most of the other debates would quickly lose themselves in this: And though such dissenters had all that candour, tenderness, and respect for their fellow-christians, which I hope we shall always endeavour to maintain, yet they would, no doubt, think themselves obliged in conscience to bear a warm and loud testimony against so crying an abomination, as they would another day appear free from the guilt of a confederacy, to poison the public fountains, and destroy the souls of men. But we make no complaint on this subject; we all unite in bearing our testimony to the oracles of God, as delivered in our own language. Oh that we were equally united in regulating our doctrine, and our discipline, our worship, and our practice by them!

You see then, on the whole, how much reason there is to believe, "that the books of the New Testament, as they are now in your hands, were written by those whose names they bear, even the first preachers and publishers of christianity." This is the grand point; and from hence it will follow by a train

of easy and natural consequences, that the gospel is most certainly true: But that is a topic of argument, abundantly sufficient to furnish out matter for another discourse. May God command his blessing on what has been already laid before us, that through the operation of his Spirit, it may be useful for establishing our regard to the scripture, and for confirming our faith in that Almighty Redeemer, who is the *Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last*; Whom to know is life everlasting*†, and in whom to believe is the great security of our eternal salvation! Amen.

* Rev. i. 8, 17. † John xvii. 3.

SERMON IX.

POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST.

The Evidences of Christianity, deduced from the New Testament, allowed to be genuine.

2 Pet. i. 16. ———*We have not followed cunningly devised Fables.*———

WHEN we are addressing ourselves to an audience of professing christians, I think, we may reasonably take it for granted, in the main course of our ministry, that they believe the truth of the gospel, and may argue with them on that supposition. To be ever laying the foundation would be the part of an unwise builder, and be greatly detrimental to your edification and comfort, and I may add, to our own. Nevertheless christians, we do not desire, that you should take it merely upon our word, that your religion is divine, and your scriptures inspired. We desire, that your faith, as well as your worship, should be a *Reasonable service**; and wish, that, in this respect, *All the Lord's people were as prophets*†; that as every christian is in his sphere *Set for the defence of the gospel*‡, each might in some measure be able to assert its truth, and, if possible, to *Convince gainsayers*§. Therefore, as we are often hinting at the chief arguments, on which this sacred cause is established, established, I trust, so firmly, that *The gates of hell shall never prevail against it*‖; so I thought it might be agreeable and useful, on this occasion, to state them a little more largely, in their proper connection, and mutual dependance. And I chose the rather to do it, as these sermons are especially intended for young people, who in an age in which infidelity so much abounds, can hardly expect to pass through the world, if they are called to converse much in it, without some attacks on their faith; which may be very dangerous, if they are not provided with some armour of proof against them. It is indeed, as I before observed, above al things to be desired, that *The heart may be established*

* Rom. xii. 1. † Numb. xi. 29. ‡ Phil. i. 17.
§ Tit. i. 9. ‖ Mat. xvi. 18.

with grace;* for we are then most secure from the danger of *forgetting God's precepts†*, when they have been the blessed means of quickening us to a divine life. Yet as other arguments have their use, and in some degree their necessity too, I shall go on briefly to propose them.

I beg therefore, that you would renew your attention, while I resume the thread of my discourse, in an entire dependance on the blessed Spirit, by whom the gospel was at first revealed and confirmed, to add success to this humble attempt for its service, and for your edification.

I am now shewing you, that christianity, which before appeared in theory probable and rational, has in fact a convincing evidence: Not only that it may be, but that it certainly is true;—as it is certain, that the New Testament, as now in your hands, is genuine;——and as it may with great evidence be argued from thence, that the gospel is a revelation from God. The first of these points I have endeavoured to prove at large; and without repeating what I said in confirmation of it, I now proceed to shew,

II. "That from allowing the New Testament to be genuine, it will certainly follow, that christianity is a divine revelation."

And here a man is at first, ready to be lost in the multiplicity of arguments which surround him. It is very easy to find proofs; but difficult to range and dispose them in such an order, as best to illustrate and confirm each other. Now I chuse to offer them in the following series, which seems to me the most natural, and perhaps may be most intelligible to you.

The authors of the books contained in the New Testament were certainly capable of judging concerning the truth of the facts they attested;——their character, so far as we can judge of it by their writings, renders them worthy of regard;——and they were under no temptation to attempt to impose on the world by such a story as they have given us, if it had been false: So that considering all things, there is no reason to believe they would attempt it:——But if they had, they must probably have perished in the attempt, and could never have gained credit in the world, had their testimony been false.——Nevertheless it is certain in fact, that they did gain credit, and succeed in a most amazing manner against all opposition.——It is certain there-

* Heb. xiii. 9. † Psal. cxix. 93.

fore, that the facts they assert were true; and if they were true, then it was reasonable for their contemporaries, and is reasonable for us, to receive the gospel as a divine revelation;——especially, if we consider what has happened in the world for the confirmation of it, since it was first propagated by them. This is the conclusion, to which I was to lead you; and I beg, you would seriously consider each of the steps, by which we arrive at it.

1. It is exceeding evident, "that the writers of the New Testament certainly knew, whether the facts they asserted were true, or false."

And this they must have known for this plain reason; because they tell us, they did not trust merely to the report, even of persons whom they thought most credible; but were present themselves, when several of the most important facts happened, and so received them on the testimony of their own senses. On this St. John, in his epistle, lays a very great and reasonable stress: *That which we have seen with our eyes*, and that not only by a sudden glance, but *which we have* attentively *looked upon, and which* even *our hands have handled of the word of life*, i. e. of Christ and his gospel,—*declare we unto you**.

Let the common sense of mankind judge here. Did not Matthew and John certainly know, whether they had personally and familiarly conversed with Jesus of Nazareth, or not? Whether he had chosen them for his constant attendants and apostles? Whether they had seen him heal the sick, dispossess devils, and raise the dead? And whether they themselves had received from him such miraculous endowments, as they say he bestowed upon them? Did not they know, whether he fell into the hands of his enemies, and was publicly put to death, or not? Did not John know, whether he saw him expiring on the cross, or not? And whether he received from him the dying charge which he records†? Did he not know, whether he saw him wounded in the side with a spear, or not? And whether he did, or did not see, that effusion of blood and water, which was an infallible argument of his being really dead? Concerning which, it being so material a circumstance, he adds, *He that saw it bears record, and he knoweth that he saith true‡;* i. e. that it was a case, in which he could not possibly be deceived. And with regard to Christ's resurrection, did he not certainly know, whether he saw our Lord again and again? And whether he handled his body, that

* 1 John i. 1, 3. † John xix. 27. ‡ John xix. 35.

he might be sure it was not a mere phantom? What one circumstance of his life could he certainly know, if he were mistaken in this?

Did not Luke know, whether he was in the ship with Paul, when that extraordinary wreck happened, by which they were thrown ashore on the island of Malta? Did he not know, whether while they were lodged together in the Governor's house, Paul miraculously *healed* one of the family, and many *other diseased persons in the island*, as he positively asserts that he did*?

Did not Paul certainly know, whether Christ *appeared to him on the way to Damascus*, or not? Whether he was blind, and afterwards on the prayer of a fellow disciple *received his sight?* Or was that a circumstance, in which there could be room for mistake? Did he not know, whether he received such extraordinary revelations, and extraordinary powers, as to be able, by the imposition of his hands, or by the words of his mouth, to work miracles, and even to convey supernatural endowments to others?

To add no more, did not Peter know, whether he saw the glory of Christ's transfiguration, and heard that voice to which he so expressly refers, when he says in the text, *We have not followed cunningly devised fables,——but were eye-witnesses of his Majesty,——when there came such a voice to him; and this voice we heard*† *?*

Now Matthew, John, Luke, Paul, and Peter, are by far the most considerable writers of the New Testament; and I am sure, when you reflect on these particulars, you must own, that there are few historians, ancient or modern, that could so certainly judge of the truth of the facts they have related. You may perhaps think, I have enlarged too much in stating so clear a case: But you will please to remember, it is the foundation of the whole argument; and that this branch of it alone cuts off infidels from that refuge, which I believe they would generally chuse, that of pleading the apostles were enthusiasts; and leaves them silent, unless they will say they were impostors: For you evidently see, that could we suppose these facts to be false, they could by no means pretend an involuntary mistake, but must, in the most criminal and aggravated sense, as Paul himself expresses it, *Be found false witnesses of God*‡. But how reasonable it would be to charge them with so notorious a crime, will in part appear, if we consider,

* Acts xxvii. 7—9. † 2 Pet. i. 16, 18. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 15.

2. "That the character of these writers, so far as we can judge by their works, seems to render them worthy of regard, and leaves no room to imagine they intended to deceive us."

I shall not stay to shew at large, that they appear to have been persons of natural sense, and at the time of their writing, of a composed mind; for I verily believe, no man that ever read the New Testament with attention, could believe they were ideots or madmen. Let the discourses of Christ in the Evangelists, of Peter and Paul in the Acts, as well as many passages in the Epistles be perused; and I will venture to say, he who is not charmed with them, must be a stranger to all the justest rules of polite criticism: But he who suspects, that the writers wanted common sense, must himself be most evidently destitute of it; and he who can suspect, they might possibly be distracted, must himself, in this instance at least, be just as mad as he imagines them to have been.

It was necessary however just to touch upon this; because, unless we are satisfied, that a person be himself in what he writes, we cannot pretend to determine his character from his writings. Having premised this, I must entreat you, as you peruse the New Testament, to observe what evident marks it bears, of simplicity and integrity, of piety and benevolence; which when you have observed, you will find them pleading the cause of its authors, with a resistless, though a gentle eloquence; and powerfully persuading the mind, that men who were capable of writing so excellently well, are not, without the strongest evidence, to be suspected of acting so detestably ill, as we must suppose they did, if in this solemn manner, they were carrying on an imposture, in such circumstances as attended the case before us. For,

(1.) The manner in which they tell their amazing story, is most happily adapted to gain our belief. For as they tell it with a great detail of circumstances, which would by no means be prudent in legendary writers, because it leaves so much the more room for confutation; so they also do it in the most easy and natural manner. There is no air of declamation and harangue; nothing that looks like artifice and design: No apologies, no encomiums, no characters, no reflections, no digressions: But the facts are recounted with great simplicity, just as they seem to have happened; and those facts are left to speak for themselves, and their great author. It is plain, that the rest of these writers, as well as the apostle Paul, did not affect *Excellency of speech*, or flights of eloquence, as the phrase signifies, but *determined to know nothing*, though amongst

the most learned and polite, *save Jesus Christ*, even *him* that was *crucified**: A conduct, that is the more to be admired, when we consider how extraordinary a theme theirs was, and with what abundant variety of most pathetic declamation it would easily have furnished any common writer; so that one would really wonder, how they could forbear it. But they rightly judged, that a vain affectation of ornament, when recording such a story as of their own knowledge, might perhaps have brought their sincerity into question, and so have rendered *The cross of Christ of none effect*†.

(2.) Their integrity does likewise evidently appear in the freedom with which they mention those circumstances, which might have exposed their Master and themselves to the greatest contempt, amongst prejudiced and inconsiderate men; such as they knew they must generally expect to meet with.—As to their Master, they scruple not to own, that his country was infamous‡, his birth and education mean§, and his life indigent‖; that he was most disdainfully rejected by the rulers¶, and accused of sabbath-breaking**, blasphemy††, and sedition‡‡; that he was reviled by the populace, as a debauchee§§, a lunatic‖‖, and a dæmoniac¶¶; and at last, by the united rage of both rulers and people, was publicly executed as the vilest of malefactors, with all imaginable circumstances of ignominy, scorn, and abhorrence***: Nor do they scruple to own, that terror and distress of spirit into which he was thrown by his sufferings†††, though this was a circumstance at which some of the heathens took the greatest offence, as utterly unworthy so excellent and divine a person.——As to themselves, the apostles readily confess, not only the meanness of their original employments‡‡‡, and the scandals of their former life§§§; but their prejudices, their follies, and their faults, after Christ had honoured them with so holy a calling: They acknowledge their slowness of apprehension under so excellent a teacher‖‖‖, their unbelief¶¶¶, their cowardice****, their ambition††††, their

* 1 Cor. ii. 1, 2. υπεροχην λογυ. † 1 Cor. i. 17. ‡ John i. 45, 46. vii. 52. § Luke ii. 4—7. Mat. xiii. 55. Mark vi. 3. ‖ Mat. viii. 20. Luke viii. 3. ¶ John vii. 48. 1 Cor. ii. 8. ** John v. 16. ix. 16. †† Mat. ix. 3. xxvi. 65. John x. 31—36. ‡‡ Luke xxiii. 2. John xix. 12. §§ Mat. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34. ‖‖ John x. 20. ¶¶ John vii 20. viii. 48. *** Mat. xxvii. 32—44. ††† Mat. xxvi. 38. Luke xxii. 44. Mat. xxvii. 46. ‡‡‡ Mat. iv. 18—21. Luke v 10. §§§ Mat. ix. 9. x. 3. Luke v. 8. Acts xxii. 4, 5. xxvi. 11. 1 Tim. i. 13, 15. ‖‖‖ Mark ix. 32. Luke ix. 45. xviii. 34. Mat. xvi. 22, 23. ¶¶¶ Mat. viii. 26. xvii. 20. Mark xvi. 14. Luke xxiv. 25. John xx. 24—27. **** Mat. xxvi. 56, 69—74. Gal. ii. 11—14. †††† Mat. xx. 20—24. Mark x. 35—44. Luke ix. 46. xxii. 24, 26.

rash zeal*, and their foolish contentions†. So that on the whole, they seem every where to forget, that they are writing of themselves, and appear not at all solicitous about their own reputation, but only that they might represent the matter just as it was, whether they went *Through honour or dishonour, through evil report or good report*‡. Nor is this all; for,

(3.) It is certain, that there are in their writings the most genuine traces, not only of a plain and honest, but a most pious and devout, a most benevolent and generous disposition. These appear especially in the epistolary parts of the New Testament, where indeed we should most reasonably expect to find them: And of these I may confidently affirm, that the greater progress any one has made, in love to God§, in zeal for his glory‖, in a compassionate and generous concern for the present and future happiness of mankind¶; the more humble**, and candid††, and temperate‡‡, and pure§§ he is; the more ardently he loves truth, and the more steadily he is determined to suffer the greatest extremity in its defence‖‖; in a word, the more his heart is weaned from the present world¶¶, and the more it is fired with the prospects of a glorious immortality***; the more pleasure will he take in reading those writings, the more will he relish the spirit which discovers itself in them, and find, that as face answers to face in water, so do the traces of piety and goodness, which appear there, answer to those which a good man feels in his own soul. Nay, I will add, that the warm and genuine workings of that excellent and holy temper, which every where discovers itself in the New Testament, have for many ages been the most effectual means of spreading a spirit

* Luke ix. 54. Mark ix. 38. † Mark ix. 34. Acts xv. 37—40. ‡ 2 Cor. vi. 8. § 1 Cor. viii. 3. Tit. iii. 4—7. 1 John iv. 16—21. v. 1—3. ‖ Rom. vi. 11, 13, xii. 1. xiv. 7, 8. 1 Cor. vi. 20. x. 31. 2 Cor. iv. 15. 1 Pet. iv. 11. ¶ Acts xx. 20, 21, 31—35. xxvi. 29. Rom. ix. 1—3. xiii. 8—10. xv. 1, 2. 1 Cor. x. 24. 2 Cor. xii. 15. Gal. vi. 10. Phil. ii. 4. 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8, 11, 12. 1 Tim. ii. 1. ** Rom. xii. 3, 16. 1 Cor. xv. 9, 10. Eph. iii. 8. Col. iii. 12. 1 Tim. i. 13, 15. 1 Pet. v. 5. †† Rom. xiv. 3, 10, 13, 19. xv. 1, 2. 1 Cor. viii. 9—13. xiii. 4—7. Gal. v. 22. ‡‡ Rom. xiii. 13, 14. 1 Cor. ix. 27. Gal. v. 24. Col. iii. 5. 2 Pet. i. 6. §§ 2 Cor. vii. 1. Phil. iv. 8. 1 Thess. iv. 3, 4. 2 Tim. ii. 21. Heb. x. 22. xii. 14. James i. 27. 1 John iii. 3. ‖‖ Acts xx. 24. 2 Cor. i. 12. iv. 2. xiii. 8. Phil. ii. 17, 18. 2 Tim. iv. 7. ¶¶ 2 Cor. iv. 18. Gal. vi. 14. Phil. iv. 11, 12. Col. iii. 2. 1 Tim. vi. 6, 10. 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4. 1 John ii. 15, 16. *** 2 Cor. v. 1—8. Phil. i. 21—23. 2 Tim. i. 12. iv. 8. Tit. ii. 13.

N. B. Those who are acquainted with the New Testament will know, that this is but a small specimen of the texts which might easily be collected on each of these heads: Yet were the energy of these few attentively considered, I cannot but think, that every well disposed mind would be deeply struck, and powerfully convinced by them.

of virtue and piety in the world; and what of it is to be found in these degenerate days, seems principally owing to these incomparable and truly divine writings.

Where then there are such genuine marks of an excellent character, not only in laboured discourses, but in epistolary writings, and those sometimes addressed to particular and intimate friends, to whom the mind naturally opens itself with the greatest freedom, surely no candid and equitable judge would lightly believe them to be all counterfeit? or would imagine, without strong proof, that persons who breathe such exalted sentiments of virtue and piety, should be guilty of any notorious wickedness: And in proportion to the degree of enormity and aggravation attending such a supposed crime, it may justly be expected, that the evidence of their having really committed it, should be unanswerably strong and convincing.

Now it is most certain, on the principles laid down above, that if the testimony of the apostles was false, they must have acted as detestable and villainous a part, as one can easily conceive. To be found, as the apostle with his usual energy expresses it, *False witnesses of God**, in any single instance, and solemnly to declare him miraculously to have done, what we know in our own consciences was never done at all, would be an audacious degree of impiety, to which none but the most abandoned of mankind could arrive. Yet, if the testimony of the apostles was false, as we have proved they could not be themselves mistaken in it, this must have been their conduct, and that, not in one single instance only, but in a thousand. Their life must, in effect, be one continued and perpetual scene of perjury; and all the most solemn actions of it, in which they were speaking to God, or speaking of him as *the God and Father of Christ*, from whom they received their mission and powers, must be a most profane and daring insult on all the acknowledged perfections of his nature.

And the inhumanity of such a conduct would, on the whole, have been equal to its impiety: For it was deceiving men in their most important interests, and persuading them to venture their whole future happiness on the power and fidelity of one, whom on this supposition, they knew to have been an impostor, and justly to have suffered a capital punishment for his crimes.

It would have been great guilt, to have given the hearts and devotions of men so wrong a turn, even though they had found magistrates ready to espouse and establish, yea, and to enforce

* 1 Cor. xv. 15.

the religion they taught. But to labour to propagate it in the midst of the most vigorous and severe opposition from them, must equally inhance the guilt and folly of the undertaking: For by this means they made themselves accessary to the ruin of thousands; and all the calamities, which fell on such proselytes, or even on their remotest descendants, for the sake of christianity, would be in a great measure chargeable on these first preachers of it. The blood of honest, yea, and (supposing them as you must, to have been involuntarily deceived), of pious, worthy, and heroic persons, who might otherwise have been the greatest blessings to the public, would, in effect, be crying for vengeance against them; and the distresses of the widows and orphans, which those martyrs might leave behind them, would join to swell the account.

So that on the whole, the guilt of those malefactors, who are from time to time the victims of public justice, even for robbery, murder, or treason, is small, when compared with that which we have now been supposing: And corrupt as human nature is, it appears to me utterly improbable, that twelve men should be found, I will not say, in one little nation, but even on the whole face of the earth, who could be capable of entering into so black a confederacy, on any terms whatsoever.

And now, in this view of the case make a serious pause, and compare with it, what we have just been saying of the character of the apostles of Jesus, so far as an indifferent person could conjecture it from their writings; and then say, whether you can in your hearts believe them to have been these abandoned wretches, at once the reproach and astonishment of mankind? You cannot surely believe such things of any; and much less of them, unless it shall appear, they were in some peculiar circumstances of strong temptation; and what those circumstances could be, it is difficult even for imagination to conceive.

But history is so far from suggesting any unthought-of fact to help our imagination on this head, that it bears strongly the contrary way; and hardly any part of my work is easier, than to shew,

3. "That they were under no temptation to forge a story of this kind, or to publish it to the world, knowing it to be false."

They could reasonably expect no gain, no reputation by it: But on the contrary, supposing it an imposture, they must, with the most ordinary share of prudence, have foreseen infamy and ruin, as the certain consequences of attempting it.

For the grand foundation of their scheme was, that *Jesus of Nazareth*, who was crucified at Jerusalem by the Jewish rulers, was *the Son of God*, and the *Lord of all* things. I appeal to your consciences, whether this looks at all like the contrivance of artful and designing men. It was evidently charging upon the princes of their country the most criminal and aggravated murder; indeed, all things considered, the most enormous act of wickedness, which the sun had ever seen. They might therefore depend upon it, that these rulers would immediately employ all their art and power, to confute their testimony, and to destroy their persons. Accordingly one of them was presently *stoned**, and another quickly after beheaded†; and most of the rest were *scattered abroad* into strange cities‡, where they would be sure to be received with great prejudices raised against them amongst the Jews by reports from Jerusalem§, and vastly strengthened by the expectations of a temporal messiah; expectations, which, as the apostles knew by their own experience, it was exceeding difficult to root out of men's minds; expectations, which would render the doctrine of *Christ crucified*, an inseparable *Stumbling block to the Jews*‖.

Nor could they expect a much better reception amongst the gentiles; with whom their business was, to persuade them to renounce the Gods of their ancestors, and to depend on a per-

* Acts vii. 59. † Acts xii. 2. ‡ Acts viii. 1, 4, xi. 19.

§ I do not here mention Philo Judæus, as speaking of "an embassy sent from the Jews in his early days, to their brethren in all parts of the world, exhorting them to resist the progress of christianity." For though Bishop Atterbury asserts, that there is such a passage, (Serm. vol. i. page 117.) I have never been able to find, or to hear of it; and therefore am ready to believe, it was a very pardonable slip of his Lordship's memory, and that the passage he intended to refer to, was a very celebrated and important one in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, in which he expressly asserts such a fact, in a manner which his integrity and good sense would never have permitted, had he not certainly known it to be true. For he addresses the learned Jew, with whom he was disputing, in these memorable words, Ου μονον ε μελενοησαλε εφ' οις επραξαλε κακοις αλλα ανδρας εκλεκλους απο Ιερουσαλημ εκλεξαμενοι τολε εξεπεμψαλε εις πασαν την γην, λεγονλες, αιρεσιν α Θεον Χριστιανων πεφηνεναι, καλαλεγονλες ταυλα απερ καθ' ημων οι αγνοουνλες ημας πανλες λεγουσιν· "You were so far from repenting of the crime you had committed, in crucifying Christ, that you sent chosen men of the most distinguished character all over the world, representing the christians as an atheistical sect, and charging us with those things which the ignorant heathens object against us." Justin. Mart. Dialog. cum Tryph. pag. 171. Thirlb.—Eusebius, and Origen, have both mentioned the same fact, which is in itself very probable; and there may possibly be some reference to it, Acts xxviii. 22. where the Jews at Rome say, *As concerning this sect* of christianity, *we know that it is every where spoken against.*

‖ 1 Cor. i. 23.

son who had died the death of a malefactor and a slave; to persuade them to forego the pompous idolatries in which they had been educated, and all the sensual indulgences with which their religion, (if it might be called a religion,) was attended, to worship one invisible God through *one Mediator*, in the most plain and simple manner; and to receive a set of precepts, most directly calculated to controul and restrain, not only the enormities of men's actions, but the irregularities of their hearts. A most difficult undertaking! And to engage them to this, they had no other arguments to bring, but such as were taken from the views of an invisible state of happiness, or misery, of which they asserted their crucified Jesus to be the supreme Disposer; who should another day dispense his blessings, or his vengeance, as the gospel had been embraced, or rejected. Now could it be imagined, that men would easily be persuaded, merely on the credit of their affirmation, or in compliance with their importunity, to believe things which to their prejudiced minds would appear so improbable, and to submit to impositions, to their corrupt inclinations so insupportable? And if they could not persuade them to it, what could the apostles then expect? What, but to be insulted as fools or madmen, by one sort of people; and by another, to be persecuted with the most savage and outrageous cruelty, as blasphemers of the Gods, as seducers of the people, and as disturbers of the public peace? All which we know accordingly happened*: Nay, they assure us, that their Lord had often warned them of it†; and that they themselves expected it‡, and thought it necessary to admonish their followers to expect it too§: And it appears, that far from drawing back upon that account, as they would surely have done if they had been governed by secular motives, they became so much the more zealous and courageous, and encouraged each other to *Resist* even *unto blood*‖.—Now as this is a great evidence of the integrity and piety of their character, and thus illustrates the former head; so it serves to the purpose

* Compare Acts v. 40. vii. 57, 58. viii. 1. ix. 1, 2. xxvi. 10, 11. ix. 23, 24. xii. 1—4. xiii. 50. xiv. 5, 19. xvi. 19—24. xvii. 5—8. xviii. 12, 13. xx. 3. xxi. 27, 28. xxii. 22. xxiii. 14. all which texts relate to the persecutions of the christians, either by Jews or Gentiles: And compare all the scriptures cited in the last note on this sermon.

† Mat. x. 16—25. xxiii. 34. Mark x. 29, 30, 39. Luke xiv. 27. xxi. 12, 17. John xv. 20, 21. xvi. 2—33. xxi. 18, 19. Acts ix. 16. ‡ Acts xx 23, 24. xxi. 13. 1 Cor. iv. 9. 2 Cor. xii. 10. 1 Thes. iii. 3, 4. 2 Tim. iv. 6. § Acts xiv. 22. 2 Tim. iii. 12. iv. 5. James v. 10, 11. 1 Pet. ii. 20, 21. iv. 1, 12—16. v. 9. ‖ Heb. xii. 4.

now immediately in view, i. e. it proves how improbable it is, that any person of common sense should engage in an imposture, from which, as many have justly observed, they could, on their own principles, have nothing to expect, but ruin in this world, and damnation in the next. When therefore we consider, and compare their character, and their circumstances, it appears utterly improbable on various accounts, that they would have attempted in this article to impose upon the world. But suppose, that in consequence of some unaccountable, as well as undiscoverable frenzy, they had ventured on the attempt, it is easy to shew,

4. " That, humanly speaking, they must quickly have perished in it, and their foolish cause must have died with them, without ever gaining any credit in the world."

One may venture to say this in general, on the principles which I before laid down: But it appears still more evident, when we consider the nature of the fact they asserted, in conjunction with the methods they took to engage men to believe it: Methods, which, had the apostles been impostors, must have had the most direct tendency to ruin both their scheme and themselves.

(1.) Let us a little more particularly reflect on the nature of that grand fact, the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ; which, as I observed, was the great foundation of the christian scheme, as first exhibited by the apostles.—The resurrection of a dead man and his ascension into, and abode in the upper world, was so strange a thing, that a thousand objections would immediately be raised against it; and some extraordinary proof would justly be required as a balance to them. Now I wish the rejecters of the gospel would set themselves to invent some hypothesis, which should have any appearance of probability, to shew how such an amazing story should ever gain credit in the world, if it had not some very convincing proof. Where, and when, could it first begin to be received? Was it in the same, or a succeeding age? Was it at Jerusalem, the spot or ground on which it is said to have happened, or in Greece, or Italy, or Asia, or Africa? You may change the scene, and the time, as you please, but you cannot change the difficulty.

Take it in a parallel instance. Suppose twelve men in London were now to affirm, that a person executed there as a malefactor in a public manner, a month, or six weeks ago, or if you please, a year, or five, or ten years since, for it is much the

same, was a prophet sent from God with extraordinary powers, that he was raised from the dead, that they conversed with him after his revival, and at last saw him taken up into heaven: Would their united testimony make them be believed there?—Or suppose them, if you please, to disperse, and that one or two of them should come hither, and go on to more distant places, suppose Leicester, Nottingham, or York, and tell their story there; and that others were to carry it over to Paris, or Amsterdam, or to Vienna, or Madrid: Could they expect any more credit with us, or with them; or hope for any thing better, than to be looked upon as lunatics, and treated as such?—And if they should go into other places, and attempt to mend their scheme, by saying their master was put to death one hundred, or two hundred years ago, when there could be no historical evidence of it discovered, and no proof given but their own confident assertion: Would they remove, or would they not rather increase, the difficulty!—Or would they, in any of these cases, gain credit by the most dexterous tricks of legerdemain, of which you can suppose them masters? Especially if they should undertake, in consequence of such supposed facts, to engage men to renounce the religion in which they had been educated; to deny themselves in their dearest passions, and most important worldly interests; and even, probably, to hazard their liberties and their lives, in dependance on a future reward, to be received in a place and state, which no man living on earth had ever seen or known? You would readily allow this to be an insupposable case: And why should you suppose it to have happened sixteen or seventeen hundred years ago? You may assure yourselves, that the reason, and the passions of mankind, were then as strong, as they are now.——But let us a little more particularly consider,

(2.) The manner, in which the apostles undertook to prove the truth of their testimony to this fact; and it will evidently appear, that instead of confirming their scheme, it must have been sufficient utterly to have overthrown it, had it been itself the most probable imposture that the wit of man could ever have contrived.—You know, they did not merely assert, that they had seen miracles wrought by this Jesus, but that he had endowed themselves with a variety of miraculous powers. And these they undertook to display, not in such idle and useless tricks as sleight of hand might perform, but in such solid and important works, as appeared worthy a divine interposition, and entirely superior to human power: Restoring, as they pretend, sight to the blind, soundness to lepers, activity to the

lame, and in some instances, life to the dead. Nor were these things undertaken in a corner, in a circle of friends, or dependants; nor were they said to be wrought on such, as might be suspected of being confederates in the fraud: But they were done often in the public streets, in the sight of enemies, on the persons of such, as were utter strangers to the apostles, but sometimes well known to the neighbours and spectators, as having long laboured under these calamities, to human skill utterly incurable*. Would impostors have made such pretensions as these? Or if they had, must they not immediately have been exposed and ruined?

Nor is there any room at all to object, that perhaps the apostles might not undertake to do these things on the spot, but only assert they had done them elsewhere: For even then, it would have been impossible they should have gained credit; and they would have seemed the less credible, on account of such a pretence. Whatever appearances there might have been of gravity, integrity and piety, in the conversation of Peter, for instance, very few, especially few that had known but little of him, would have taken it upon his word, that he saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead at Bethany: But fewer yet would have believed it upon his affirmation, had it been ever so solemn, that he had himself raised Dorcas at Joppa; unless he had done some extraordinary work before them, correspondent at least, if not equal to that. You will easily think of invincible objections, which otherwise might have been made; and undoubtedly, the more such assertions have been multiplied, every new person, and scene, and fact, had been an additional advantage given to the enemy, to have detected and confuted the whole scheme, which Peter and his associates had thus endeavoured to establish.

But to come still closer to the point: If the New Testament be genuine, as I have already proved it, then it is certain, that the apostles pretend to have wrought miracles in the very presence of those, to whom their writings were addressed; nay more, they profess likewise to have conferred those miraculous gifts, in some considerable degrees, on others†, even on the very persons to whom they write; and they appeal to their consciences as to the truth of it. And could there possibly be room for delusion here? It is exceedingly remarkable to this purpose, that Paul makes this appeal to the Corinthians‡, and Galatians§, when there were amongst them some persons disaffected to him,

* Acts iii. 1—10. v. 15. ix. 33—42. xiv. 8—10. xix. 11, 12. xx. 9—12. xxviii. 7—9.
† Acts viii. 17. xix. 6. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 5, 7. ii. 4, 5. ix. 2. xii. 8—11, 28—30. xiv. 1—18, 26, and seq. 2 Cor. xi. 5, 6. xiii. 12, 13. xii. 3, 10. § Gal. iii. 2, 5.

who were taking all opportunities to sink his character, and destroy his influence: And could they have wished for a better opportunity, than such an appeal? An appeal, which, had not the fact it supposed been certain, far from recovering those that were wavering in their esteem, must have been sufficient utterly to disgust his most cordial and steady friends.—And the same remark may be applied to the advices and reproofs, which the apostle there gives, relating to the use and abuse of their *Spiritual gifts**; which had been most notoriously absurd, and even ridiculous, had not the christians to whom he wrote, been really possessed of them. And these gifts were so plainly supernatural, that, as it has often been observed, if it be allowed, that miracles can prove a divine revelation, and that the first epistle to the Corinthians be genuine, (of which, by the way, there is at least as pregnant evidence, as that any part of the New Testament is so†,) then it follows by a sure and easy consequence, that christianity is true. Nevertheless other arguments are not to be forgot in this survey.—And therefore, as I have proved under this head, that had the testimony of the apostles been false, it is not to be imagined, that they could have gained credit at all; and especially, when they had put the proof of their cause on such a footing, as we are sure they did; I am now to shew you,

5. "That it is certain in fact, that the apostles did gain early credit, and succeeded in a most wonderful manner;" from whence it will follow, that their testimony was true.

That the apostles did indeed gain credit in the world, is evident, from what I before offered to prove the early prevalence of christianity in it; and may farther be confirmed, from many passages in the New Testament. And here, I insist not so much on express historical testimonies, though some of them are very remarkable; especially that of the brethren at Jerusalem, who speak of many myriads of believing Jews assembled at the feast of Pentecost‡. But I argue from the epistles written to several churches, which plainly prove, that there were congregations of christians in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Colosse, Thessalonica,

* 1 Cor. xii. 1—7. xiv. per tot.

† I cannot but look upon it as a kind and remarkable providence to this purpose, that there is still extant an epistle of Clemens Romanus to the church at Corinth, probably written before the year of Christ 70, in which he plainly refers to 1 Cor. i. 12. in what he cites from "an epistle of Paul written to them by the spirit at his first preaching the gospel among them." Clem. Epist. 1. ad. Cor. §. 47.

‡ Acts xxi. 20.

Philippi, Laodicea*, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia†, Crete‡, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia§, and many other places; insomuch that one of the apostles could say, that Christ had so wrought by him, *To make the Gentiles obedient*, not only *in word* or profession, but *in deed* too, *that from Jerusalem, even round about unto Illyricum*, he had *fully preached the gospel of Christ*‖, or as the word imports¶, had accomplished the purposes of it. And there is a great deal of reason, both from the nature of the thing, and from the testimony of ancient history**, to believe, that others of the apostles had considerable success elsewhere: So that Paul might with reason apply to them and their doctrine, what is originally spoken of the luminaries of heaven and the instruction they communicate, *Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world*††.

So great was the number of those, who were proselyted to christianity by the preaching of the apostles: And we have all imaginable reason to believe, that there were none of all these proselytes, but what were fully persuaded of the truth of the testimony they bore; for otherwise, no imaginable reason can be given for their entering themselves into such a profession. The apostles had no secular terrors to affright them, no secular rewards to bribe them‡‡, no dazzling eloquence to enchant them §§: On the contrary, all these were in a powerful manner pleading against the apostles: Yet their testimony was received, and their new converts were so thoroughly satisfied with the evidence which they gave them of their mission, that they encountered great persecutions, and cheerfully ventured estate, liberty and life itself, on the truth of the facts they asserted; as plainly appears from many passages in the epistles, which none can think the apostles would have ever written, if these first christians had not been in a persecuted condition‖‖.

* Col. iv. 16. † Rev. ii. and iii. ‡ Tit. i. 5. § 1 Pet. i. 1.
‖ Rom. xv. 18, 19. ¶ πεπληρωκεναι. ** Euseb. Histor. Eccles. Lib. iii. cap. 1.
†† Compare Rom. x. 18. and Psal. xix. 4.

‡‡ As for the distribution of goods in Judea, it is plain it was peculiar to that time and country; and the extraordinary persecution, which from the very infancy of christianity prevailed there, was more than an equivalent for any advantage, which the poorest of the people could gain by it. I did not therefore think it necessary to mention it.

§§ 1 Cor. i. 17. ii. 1, 4, 13. 2 Cor. x. 10. xi. 6. ‖‖ Rom. viii. 36. 1 Cor. iv. 11—13. xv. 29—32. 2 Cor. i. 8, 9. iv. 8—11. vi. 4, 5, 9. xi. 23—27. Gal. vi. 17. Phil. i. 28—30. 1 Thess. i. 6 ii 14, 15. 2 Thess. i. 4—7. 2 Tim i. 8. ii. 3, 9, 12, 13 iii. 11, 12. Heb. x. 32—34. James ii. 6. v. 10, 11. 1 Pet. ii. 19, 20. iii. 14—17. iv. 1, 12—16. Rev. ii. 10, 13.

Nor will it signify any thing to object, that most of these converts were persons of a low rank, and ordinary education, who therefore might be more easily imposed upon than others: For, not to mention Sergius Paulus, Dionysius the Areopagite, or the domestics of Cæsar's household, with others of superior stations in life, it is sufficient to remind you, that, as I have largely shewn, the apostles did not put their cause on the issue of laboured arguments, in which the populace might quickly have been entangled and lost, but on such plain facts, as they might judge of as easily and surely, as any others; indeed on what they themselves saw, and in part too, what they felt.

Now I apprehend, this might be sufficient to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion. You have seen that as there is no reason to believe, that the apostles, who certainly knew the truth, would have attempted a fraud of this kind;——so if they had attempted it, they could not possibly have succeeded; —nevertheless they did succeed in a very remarkable manner;— wherefore it plainly follows, that what they testified was true.

And now then, after this, the reasonableness of receiving the gospel, on admitting the truth of what they testified concerning Christ, is an easy consequence.—Yet some things are to be offered under this head, which are of great weight, and would not so conveniently have fallen under any of the former: And some considerable additional evidence to the truth of christianity arises, from what has happened in the world, since its first propagation. And therefore I chuse rather to make a distinct discourse on these, with the improvement of the whole, than to throw together the hints of them, in so hasty a manner as I must do, should I attempt to dispatch the subject in this discourse, the just limits of which I have already transgressed, lest the great chain of the argument should be broken.

SERMON X.

POWER AND GRACE OF CHRIST.

Additional Evidences of Christianity, and Reflections on the whole.

2 Pet. i. 16.——*We have not followed cunningly devised Fables.*——

AS I had before proved the books of the New Testament to be genuine, I proceeded in my last discourse, to argue from thence the certain truth of the christian revelation; and we have made some considerable progress in the argument.

The matter in short stands thus.——The authors of the New Testament certainly knew, whether the facts they asserted were true, or false; so that they could not themselves be deceived: Neither can we think they would attempt to deceive others, since they appear by their manner of writing, to have been persons of great integrity and goodness;——and it is likewise evident, they could have no temptation to attempt a fraud of this nature:——However, if they had attempted it, we cannot imagine they could have gained credit in the world, if the facts they asserted had not been true:—Nevertheless they did gain credit in a very remarkable manner; from whence it plainly follows, that these facts were true.—Now I am to shew farther, to complete the proof of our grand proposition,

6. "That admitting the facts which they testified concerning Christ to be true, then it was reasonable for their contemporaries, and is reasonable for us, to receive the gospel which they have transmitted to us as a divine revelation."

The great thing they asserted was, that Jesus was the Christ, and that he was proved to be so,—by prophecies accomplished in him,—and by miracles wrought by him, and by others in his name. Let us attend to each of these, and I am persuaded we shall find them no contemptible arguments; but must be forced to acknowledge, that the premises being established, the conclusion most easily and necessarily follows: And

this conclusion, that Jesus is the Christ, taken in all its extent, is an abstract of the gospel revelation, and therefore is sometimes put for the whole of it*.

The Apostles, especially when disputing with the Jews, did frequently argue from "the prophecies of the Old Testament;" in which, they say, many things were expressly foretold, which were most literally and exactly fulfilled in *Jesus of Nazareth*†. Now, greatly to the evidence, confirmation, and advantage of christianity, so it is, that these prophecies are to this day extant in their original language; and this, in the hands of a people, most implacably averse to the gospel: So that, an attentive reader may still, in a great measure, satisfy himself, as to the validity of the argument drawn from them.

On searching these ancient and important records, we find, not only in the general, that God intended to raise up for his people an illustrious deliverer, who amongst other glorious titles, is sometimes called the Messiah, or the anointed one‡; But we are more particularly told, that this great event should happen, before the government ceased in the tribe of Judah§; while the second temple was standing‖; and a little before its destruction, about 490 years after a command given to rebuild Jerusalem¶; which was probably issued out in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, or at least within a few years before, or after it. It is predicted, that he should be the seed of Abraham**, born of a virgin, of the house of David††, in the town of Bethlehem‡‡; that he should be anointed with an extraordinary effusion of the divine Spirit§§, in virtue of which, he should not only be a perfect and illustrious example of universal holiness and goodness‖‖, but should also perform many extraordinary and beneficial miracles¶¶; nevertheless, that, for want of external pomp and splendour, he should be rejected and insulted by the Jews***, and at length be cut off and slain by them†††. It is added, that he should arise from the dead before his body should be corrupted in the grave‡‡‡; and should be received up to heaven, and there seated at the right hand of God§§§; from whence he should in a wonderful manner, pour out his Spirit on his followers‖‖‖; in consequence of which, though the

* Acts viii. 37. ix. 22. xvii. 3. xviii. 5. † John ii. 22. v. 1. † Acts ii. 25—31. iii. 18—25. vii. 37. viii. 35. x. 43. xiii. 23, 27, 32—37, 40, 41. xvii. 2, 3. xxvi. 22, 23, 27. xxviii. 23. ‡ Dan. ix. 25, 26. Psal. ii. 2. § Gen. xlix. 10. ‖ Hag. ii. 7, 9. ¶ Dan. ix. 25—27. ** Gen. xii. 3. xviii. 18. xxii. 18. †† Isa. vii. 14. xi. 1. Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. ‡‡ Mic. v. 2. §§ Isa. xlii. 1. lxi. 1. ‖‖ Isa. xlii. 1, 4. liii 9. Psal. xlv. 7. ¶¶ Isa. xxxv. 5, 6. *** Isa. liii. 2—4. ††† Isa. liii. 7—9. Dan ix. 26. ‡‡‡ Psal. xvi. 9, 10. Isa. xxvi. 19. liii. 10—12. §§§ Psal. xvi. 11. cx. 1. ‖‖‖ Joel ii. 28, 29.

body of the Jewish people perished in their obstinate opposition to him*, yet, the Gentiles should be brought to the knowledge of the true God†, and a kingdom established amongst them, which from small beginnings should spread itself to the ends of the earth, and continue to the remotest ages‡.

Besides these most material circumstances, there were several others relating to him, which were either expressly foretold, or at least hinted at; all which, with those already mentioned, had so evident an accomplishment in Jesus, allowing the truth of the facts which the apostles testified concerning him, that we have no reason to wonder, that they should receive the word with all readiness, who searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so predicted there, as the apostles affirmed§. For I am persuaded, that no wise and religious person could imagine, that God would permit an impostor to arise, in whom so great a variety of predictions, delivered by so many different persons, and in so many distant ages, should have an exact accomplishment.

When the apostles were preaching to heathens, it is indeed true, that they generally waved the argument from prophecy, because they were not so capable judges of it: But then they insist on another, which might as soon captivate their belief, and as justly vindicate it, I mean, "the miracles performed by Christ, and those commissioned and influenced by him." Many of these were of such a nature, as not to admit of any artifice or deceit: Especially, that most signal one of his resurrection from the dead, which I may call a miracle performed by, as well as upon Christ; because he so expressly declares, that he had himself a power to resume his life at pleasure‖. The apostles well knew, this was a fact of such a nature, that they who believed this, would never doubt of the rest: They therefore often single this out, and lay the whole stress of their cause upon it¶. This they proved to be true, by their own testimony miraculously confirmed; and in proving this, they establish christianity on an impregnable rock. For I may safely refer it to any of you to judge, whether it is an imaginable thing, that God should raise the dead body of an impostor; especially when he had solemnly appealed to such a resurrection, as the

* Isa. vi. 9, 10. xxix. 10. xlix. 4, 5. liii. 1. lxv. 2. † Psal. ii. 8. xxii. 27. lxxxvi. 9. Isa. ii. 2, 3. xi. 10. xlii. 1, 4, 6, 7. xlv. 22. xlix. 6—12. Mal. i. 11. ‡ Dan. ii. 44. vii. 13, 14, 27. § Acts xvii. 11. ‖ John x. 18. ¶ Acts ii. 24—32. iii. 15. iv. 10. v. 30, 32. x. 40, 41. xiii. 30—39. xvii. 31. xxvi. 23. Rom. x. 9. 1 Cor. xv. 3—8, 12—22.

grand proof of his mission, and had expressly fixed the very day on which it was to happen*.

I persuade myself you are convinced by all this, that they who on the apostles' testimony believed, that the prophecies of the Old Testament were accomplished in Jesus, and that God bore witness to him by miracles, and raised him from the dead, had abundant reason to believe, that the doctrine which Christ taught was divine, and his gospel a revelation from heaven. And if they had reason to admit this conclusion, then it is plain, that we, who have such satisfactory evidence, on the one hand, that the testimony of the apostles was credible, and on the other, that this was the substance of it, have reason also to admit this grand inference from it, and to embrace the gospel as *A faithful saying*, and as well *worthy of all acceptation*†. This is the thing I was attempting to prove; and here I should end the argument, were it not for the confirmation it may receive from some additional considerations, which could not properly be introduced under any of the preceding heads. I add, therefore,

7. In the last place, "that the truth of the gospel has received farther, and very considerable confirmation, from what has happened in the world since it was first published."

And here I must desire you, more particularly to consider, ——on the one hand, what God has been doing to establish it; ——and on the other, the methods which its enemies have been taking to destroy it.

(1.) Consider "what God has been doing to confirm the gospel since its first publication," and you will find it a farther evidence of its divine original.

I might here argue at large, from its surprising propagation in the world;——from the miraculous powers, with which not only the apostles, but succeeding preachers of the gospel, and other converts were endowed;——from the accomplishment of prophecies recorded in the New Testament;——and from the preservation of the Jews as a distinct people, notwithstanding the various difficulties and persecutions through which they have passed.

I might particularly urge, in confirmation of the truth of christianity, "the wonderful success with which it was

* Mat. xxvii. 63. John ii. 19, 21. † 1 Tim. i. 15.

attended, and the surprising propagation of the gospel in the world."

I have before endeavoured under a former head to shew you, that the gospel met with so favourable a reception in the world, as evidently proved, that its first publishers were capable of producing such evidence of its truth, as an imposture could not admit. But now, I carry the remark farther, and assert, that considering the circumstances of the case, it is amazing that even truth itself, under so many disadvantages, should have so illustrious a triumph; and that its wonderful success does evidently argue such an extraordinary interposition of God in its favour, as may justly be called a miraculous attestation to it.

There was not only *one of a family, or two of a city taken, and brought to Zion*;* but so did *The Lord hasten it in its* appointed *time*, that *a little one became a thousand, and a small one a strong nation*†. And as the apostles themselves were honoured with very remarkable success, so this divine seed was propagated so fast in the next age, that Pliny testifies, "he found the heathen temples in Achaia, almost deserted‡:" And Tertullian afterwards boasts, "that all places but those temples were filled with christians; so that were they only to withdraw, cities and provinces would be depopulated‡." Nor did the gospel only triumph thus within the boundaries of the Roman empire; for long before Tertullian was born, Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, which seems to have been written not much above one hundred years after Christ's death, declares, "that there was no nation of men, whether Greeks or Barbarians, not excepting those savages, that wandered in clans from one region to another, and had no fixed habitation, who had not learnt to offer prayers and thanksgivings to the Father and Maker of all, in the name of Jesus who was crucified‖."

* Jer. iii. 14. † Isa. lx. 22.

‡ Prope jam desolata Templa—& sacra Solennia diu intermissa.
Plin. Epist. x. 97.

§ Hesterni sumus, & vestra omnia implevimus, Urbes, Insulas, Castella, Municipia, Conciliabula, Castra ipsa, Tribus, Decurias, Palatium, Senatum, Forum; Sola vobis relinquimus Templa:—Potuimus & inermes, nec rebelles, sed tantummodo discordes, solius divortii invidiâ adversus vos dimicasse;—suffudisset dominationem vestram tot amissio civium, & ipsa destitutione punisset.
Tertul. Apolog. Cap. xxxvii.

‖ Οὐδε εν γαρ ολος εστι το γενος ανθρωπων, εἰτε Βαρβαρων, εἰτε Ελληνων, εἰτε απλως φυλων ονομαζι προσαγορευομενων, η Αμαξοβιων, η Αοικων καλυβων,

Now how can we account for such a scene as this, but by saying, that *The hand of the Lord was with* the first preachers of the gospel, and therefore such *multitudes believed, and turned unto the Lord*?* How had it been possible, that so small a fountain should presently have swelled into a mighty river, and even have covered the face of the earth, had it not sprung from the sanctuary of God, and been rendered thus triumphant by his almighty arm?

Had this new religion, so directly contrary to all the prejudices of education, been contrived to soothe men's vices, to assert their errors, to defend their superstitions, or to promote their secular interests, we might easily have accounted for its prevalence in the world. Had its preachers been very profound philosophers, or polite and fashionable orators, many might have been charmed, at least for a while, to follow them: Or had the princes and potentates of the earth declared themselves its patrons, and armed their legions for its defence and propagation, multitudes might have been terrified into the profession, though not a soul could by such means have been rationally persuaded to the belief of it. But without some such advantages as these we can hardly conceive, how any new religion should so strangely prevail; even though it had crept into the world in its darkest ages, and most barbarous countries, and though it had been gradually proposed in the most artful manner, with the finest veil industriously drawn over every part, which might at first have given disgust to the beholder.

But you well know, that the very reverse of all this was the case here. You know, from the apparent constitution of christianity, that the lusts and errors, the superstitions and interests of carnal men would immediately rise up against it as a most irreconcileable enemy. You know, that the learning and wit of the Greeks, and the Romans, were early employed to overbear and ridicule it. You know, that as all the herd of heathen deities were to be discarded, the priests, who subsisted on that craft, must in interest find themselves obliged to oppose it. You know, that the princes of the earth drew their swords against it, and armed torments and death for the destruction of its followers. And yet you see, that it triumphed over all, though published in ages, and places, of the greatest learning and refinement; and proposed, not in an ornamental and artificial

η εν σκηναις κτηνοτροφων, εν οις μη, δια τε ονοματος τε σταυρωθεντος Ιησε ευχαι και ευχαριστιαι τω πατρι και ποιητη των ολων γινονται.

Justin. Mart. pag. 388. Edit. Thirlb.

* Acts xi. 21.

manner, but with the utmost plainness: The doctrines of the cross being always avowed as its grand fundamentals, though so notorious *a stumbling block* both to Jews and Gentiles*; and the absolute necessity, not only of embracing christianity, but also of renouncing all idol worship, being insisted on immediately and in the strongest terms, though it must make the gospel appear the most singular and unsociable religion that had ever been taught in the world.

Had one of the wits, or politicians of these ages seen the apostles, and a few other plain men, who had been educated amongst the lowest of the people, as most of the first teachers of christianity were, going out armed with nothing but faith, truth, and goodness, to encounter the power of princes, the bigotry of priests, the learning of philosophers, the rage of the populace, and the prejudices of all; how would he have derided the attempt, and said with Sanballat, *What will these feeble Jews do*†*?* But had he seen the event, surely he must have owned, with the Egyptian Magi, in a far less illustrious miracle, that it was *The finger of God*‡, and might justly have *fallen on his face*, even amongst those whom he had insulted, with an humble acknowledgment *That God was in them of a truth*§.

I might here farther urge "those miracles, which were wrought in confirmation of the christian doctrine, for a considerable time after the death of the apostles."

The most signal, and best attested of these, was the dispossession of devils; whom God seems to have permitted to rage with an unusual violence about those times, that his Son's triumph over them might be so much the more remarkable, and that the old serpent might be taken in his own craftiness. I doubt not, but many of you have heard, that more than two hundred years after the death of Christ, some of the most celebrated defenders of the gospel, which the church has in any age produced, I mean Tertullian‖, and Minutius Fælix¶, do not only challenge any of their heathen enemies and persecutors, to bring them a demoniack, engaging, at the hazard of their lives, to oblige the evil spirit, in the name, and by the authority of Christ, to quit his possession; but do also appeal to it, as a fact publicly known, that those who were agitated by such spirits, stood terrified, and amazed in the presence of a christian, and that their pretended Gods were compelled then to confess themselves devils.

I wave the testimonies of some later writers of the christian

* 1 Cor. i. 23. † Neh. iv. 2. ‡ Exod. viii. 19.
§ 1 Cor. xiv. 25. ‖ Tertul. Apolog. Cap. ii. ¶ Minut. Fæl. Cap. xxvii.

church, lest the credulity of their temper, joined with the circumstances attending some of the facts they record, should furnish out objections against their testimony; though I think we cannot, without great injustice to the character of the learned and pious Augustin, suspect the truth of some amazing facts of this kind, which he has attested, as of his own personal and certain knowledge*.

Nor must I on this occasion forget to mention "the accomplishment of several prophecies, recorded in the New Testament," as a farther confirmation given by God to the gospel.

The most eminent and single instance under this head, is that of our Lord's prediction concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, as it is recorded by St. Matthew in his twenty-fourth chapter. The tragical history of it is most circumstantially described by Josephus, a Jewish priest, who was an eye-witness of it; and the description he has given of this sad calamity, so exactly corresponds to the prophecy, that one would have thought, had we not known the contrary, that it had been written by a christian on purpose to illustrate it: And one can never enough admire that series of amazing providences, by which the author was preserved from most imminent danger; that he might leave us that invaluable treasure which his writings contain†.

We have no need of any farther evidence, than we find in him, of the exact accomplishment of what was prophesied concerning the destruction of Jerusalem: But our Lord had also foretold the long continued desolation of their temple ‡; and I cannot forbear reminding you of the awful sanction that was given to that part of the prediction: For it is well known, that a heathen historian has assured us, that when Julian the apostate, in deliberate contempt of that prediction, solemnly and resolutely undertook to rebuild it, his impious design was miraculously frustrated again and again, and the workmen consumed by globes of fire, which broke out from the foundations§.

* Augustin, de Civit. Dei, Lib. xxii. cap. 8. † Joseph. Bell. Jud. Lib. iii. cap. 8.
‡ Mat. xxiii. 38. xxiv. 2.

§ Cum itaque fortiter rei instaret Alypius, juvaretque provinciæ rector, metuendi globi flammarum, prope fundamenta crebris assultibus erumpentes, fecere locum exustis aliquoties operantibus, inaccessum; hocque modo, elemento destinatius repellente, cessavit inceptum. Ammian. Marcell. Lib. xxiii. sub init. I think one might argue the author to have been a heathen, from this cold way of telling a story so glorious to christianity: "The element repelling them by a kind of obstinate fatality." The learned reader will easily observe with how different an air Socrates (Hist. Lib. iii. cap. 20.) and Sozomen (Hist. Lib. v. cap. 22.) recount, and most reasonably triumph in it.

The prediction of St. Paul concerning the man of sin, and the apostacy of the later times*, is also well worthy of our remark. And though a great deal of the book of revelation be still concealed under a dark veil; yet the division of the Roman empire into ten kingdoms, the usurpation, persecutions and idolatry of the Romish church, and the long duration of the papal power, with several other extraordinary events, which no human prudence could have foreseen, and which have happened long since the publication of that book, are so clearly foretold there, that I cannot but look on that part of scripture as an invaluable treasure†; and think it not at all improbable, that the more visible accomplishment of some of its other prophecies may be a great means of reviving the christian cause, which is at present so much on the decline‡.

"The preservation of the Jews as a distinct people," is another particular under this head, which well deserves our attentive regard.

It is plain they are vastly numerous, notwithstanding all the slaughter and destruction of this people, in former, and in later ages. They are dispersed in various most distant nations, and particularly in these parts of the world where christianity is professed: And though they are exposed to great hatred and contempt, on account of their different faith, and in most places subjected to civil incapacities, if not to unchristian severities; yet they are still most obstinately tenacious of their religion: Which is the more wonderful, as their fathers were so prone to apostatize from it; and as most of them seem to be utter strangers, either to piety, or humanity, and pour out the greatest contempt on the moral precepts of their own law, while they are so attached to the ceremonial institutions of it, troublesome and inconvenient as they are. Now seriously reflect, what an evident hand of providence is here; that by their dispersion, preservation, and adherence to their religion, it should come to pass, that christians should daily see the accomplishment of many remarkable

* 2 Thess. iii. 3—12. 1 Tim. iv. 1—3.

† I can with great pleasure refer my reader to the learned commentary on this book lately published by the Reverend Mr. Lowman; from which I have received more satisfaction, with respect to many of its difficulties, than I ever found elsewhere, or expected to have found at all.

‡ Hinc igitur apud nos futurorum quoque fides tuta est, jam scilicet probatorum, quia cum illis quæ quotidie probantur prædicebantur. Tertul. Apol. cap. xx

prophecies concerning this people* ; and that we should always have amongst us such a crowd of unexceptionable witnesses to the truth of those ancient hebrew records, on which so much of the evidence of the gospel depends : Records, which are many of them so full to the purpose for which we alledge them, that, as a celebrated writer very well observes†, " Had the whole body of the jewish nation been converted to christianity, men would certainly have thought, they had been forged by christians, and have looked upon them, with the prophecies of the Sybils, as made many years after the events they pretend to foretel." And to add no more here, the preservation of the Jews as a distinct people evidently leaves room for the accomplishment of those Old and New Testament promises ‡ : which relate to their national conversion and restoration ; whereas that would be impossible in itself, or at least be impossible to be known, if they were promiscuously blended with other people. On the whole, it is such a scene in the conduct of providence, as I am well assured cannot be paralelled in the history of any other nation on earth, and affords a most obvious and important argument in favour of the gospel.

Thus has christianity been farther confirmed, since its first publication, by what God has done to establish it. It only remains that we consider,

2. What confirmation it receives, " from the methods which its enemies have taken to destroy it."

And these have generally been, either persecution, or falsehood, or cavilling at some particulars in the revelation, without entering into the grand argument on which it is built, and fairly debating what is offered in its defence. Now who would not think the better of a cause, for being thus attacked ?

At first you know, that the professors, and especially the preachers of the gospel, were severely persecuted. *In every city bonds and imprisonments awaited them*§. As soon as ever

* This important thought is most excellently illustrated in that incomparable old book of Dr. Jackson's, called, " The Eternal Truth of the Scriptures, &c." especially Book I. Part II. Sect. III. chap. 10—13. The whole of the section is very curious.

† Spectat. vol. vi. No. 495.

‡ Deut. xxx. 3—5. Isa. xxvii. 12, 13. xlv. 17. xlix. 6. liv. lix. 20, 21. xl. lxi. lxii. lxv. lxvi. Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. xxx. 3—24. xxxi. 31—40. l. 4, 5. Ezek. xi. 17—20. xx. 34—44. xxxiv. 11—31. xxx vi. 21—38. xxxvii. 21, 28. Hos. i. 10, 11. ii. 14—23. iii. 4, 5. Joel iii. Amos ix. 11—15. Obad. ver. 17—21. Mic. vii. 14—20. Zech. viii. 7—23. x. 6—12. xii. 10. xiv. 9—21. Rom. xi. 25—27. 2 Cor. iii. 16.

§ Acts xx. 23.

the apostles began to preach Jesus and his resurrection, the jewish rulers laid hold on them, and having confined and scourged them, strictly prohibited their speaking any more in that name*. A little while after, Stephen was murdered†; and afterwards James‡, and some other of the apostles. Now certainly such a conduct did evidently shew a consciousness, that they were not able to answer the apostles, and to support their own cause by the fair methods of reason and argument; to which, so far as the history informs us, they made no pretence; but attempted to bear them down by dint of authority, and to silence them by brutal force.

The time would fail me, should I attempt particularly to shew, how these unrighteous methods were pursued in succeeding ages, and distant countries. The savage cruelties of Nero to these innocent and holy men were such, as raised the pity even of their enemies§: Yet this was one of the least extensive and destructive of the ten general persecutions, which arose in the Roman empire, besides several others in the neighbouring countries, of which ecclesiastical history informs us.

These early enemies of the gospel added falsehood and slanders to their inhumanities. They endeavoured to murder the reputations of the christians, as well as their persons, and were not ashamed to represent them as haters of the whole human species‖, for no imaginable reason, but because they would not associate themselves in their idolatrous worship, but with regard to charity and truth, were strongly bearing their testimony against it¶: Nay, they charged them with human sacrifices, incest, idolatry, and all the crimes, for which themselves and their foolish Gods were indeed justly detestable; but from which the christians knew how to vindicate themselves, highly to their own honour, and to the everlasting reproach of these malignant and pestilent accusers: And they have not failed to do it in many noble apologies, which through the divine providence are transmitted to us, and are incomparably the most valuable of any ancient uninspired writings.

* Acts iv. 17. v. 40. † Acts vii. 58. ‡ Acts xii. 2.

§ This a haughty and cruel enemy confesses, even while he blasphemes the religion of these glorious confessors:—Quanquam adversus sontes, & novissima exempla meritos, miseratio oriebatur. Tacit. Annal. Lib. xv. §. 44.

‖ Odio humani generis convicti sunt. Tacit. ubi supra.

¶ This matter is set in the clearest and most beautiful light by the sagacious Mr. Warburton, in his Divine Legation of Moses, vol. i. p. 292—295. to whose labours the learned and the christian world are indebted beyond expression, for as great a number of original thoughts, as are perhaps any where to be found in an equal compass.

Such were the infamous and scandalous methods, by which the gospel was opposed in the earliest ages of the church; and I cannot forbear adding, "that the measures more lately taken to subvert it, especially amongst ourselves, seem to me rather to reflect a glory upon it." Its unhappy enemies have been told again and again, that we put the proof of it on plain fact. They themselves do not, and cannot deny, that it prevailed early in the world, as we have shewn at large. There must have been some man, or body of men, who first introduced it: They generally confess, that Christ and his apostles were the persons: And these apostles, on whose testimony what we know of Christ chiefly depends, must have been enthusiasts, or impostors, if their testimony was false. Now which of these schemes will the unbeliever take? It seems, that the deists of the present age fix on neither, as being secretly conscious they can support neither; but they content themselves with cavilling at some circumstances attending the revelation without daring to encounter its grand evidence; i. e. they have been laboriously attempting to prove it "to be improbable, or absurd, to suppose that to have been which nevertheless plainly appears to have been fact." One most weakly and sophistically pretends to prove, in defiance of the common sense of mankind, that the light of nature is a perfect rule, and therefore that all revelation is needless, and indeed impossible. Another disguises the miracles of Christ by false and foolish representations of them, and then sets himself to ridicule them as idle tales. And a third takes a great deal of fruitless pains to shew, that some prophecies referred to in the New Testament are capable of another sense, different from that in which the apostles have taken them. These things have been set in a very artful and fallacious light by persons, whose names will be perhaps transmitted to posterity, with the infamous glory of having been leaders in the cause of infidelity; but not a man of them undertakes directly to answer, what has been said to ascertain the grand fact. Nay, they generally take no more notice of the positive evidence, by which it is even demonstrated, than if they had never heard it proposed; though they cavil at incidental passages in those books, in which it is most clearly stated. And as for what they have urged, though perhaps some, who were before weary of christianity, may have taken occasion from their writings to reject it; and others for want of consulting the answers to them, may have been unwarily insnared; yet the examination of these points has been greatly to the honour and vindication of the truth, which seems on this occasion to have been set in a clearer and stronger light than ever, at least in these later ages.

The cause of christianity has greatly gained by debate, and the gospel comes like fine gold out of the furnace, which the more it is tried, the more it is approved. I own, the defenders of the gospel have appeared with very different degrees of ability for the work; nor could it be otherwise amongst such numbers of them: But on the whole, though the patrons of infidelity have been masters of some wit, humour and address, as well as of a moderate share of learning, and generally much more than a moderate share of assurance; yet so great is the force of truth, that, unless we may except those writers, who have unhappily called for the aid of the civil magistrate in the controversy, I cannot recollect, that I have seen any defence of the gospel, which has not, on the whole, been sufficient to establish it, notwithstanding all the sophistical arguments of its most subtile antagonists.

This is an observation, which is continually gaining new strength, as new assaults are made upon the gospel. And I cannot forbear saying, that as if it were by a kind of judicial infatuation, some who have distinguished themselves in the wretched cause of infidelity, have been permitted to fall into such gross misrepresentations, such senseless inconsistencies, and such palpable falsehoods*, and in a word, into such a various and malignant superfluity of naughtiness; that to a wise and pious mind they must appear like those venomous creatures, which are said to carry an antidote in their bowels against their own poison. A virtuous and well-bred deist must turn away from some modern pieces of this kind with scorn and abhorrence; and a christian might almost be tempted to wish, that the books, with all their scandals about them, might be transmitted to posterity, lest when they come to live, like the writings of some of the ancient heathens, only in those of their learned and pious answerers, it should hardly be credited, that ever the enemies of the gospel in such an enlightened age, should be capable of so much impiety and folly.

Thus I have given you a brief view of the chief arguments in proof of christianity; and the sum of the whole is this.

The gospel is probable in theory; as considering the nature of God, and the circumstances of mankind, there was reason to hope a revelation might be given; and if any were given, we should naturally apprehend its internal evidence

* I mention not here that mean buffoonery and scurility, that industrious, though aukward, disguise, and monstrous mixture of the sceptic and dogmatist, which the learned and ingenious Mr Warburton has animadverted upon with such justice and spirit, in his fine Dedication to the Divine Legation of Moses demonstrated.

would be such, as that of the gospel is, and its external such, as it is said to be. But it is also true in fact; for christianity was early professed, as it was first introduced by *Jesus of Nazareth*, whose life and doctrines were published by his immediate attendants; whose books are preserved still in their original language, and in the main are faithfully translated into our own: So that the books of the New Testament now in your hands may be depended upon, as written by the persons whose names they bear. And admitting this, the truth of the gospel follows by a train of very easy consequences; for the authors certainly knew the truth of the facts they relate; and considering what appears of their character and circumstances, we can never believe they would have attempted to deceive us; or if they had, they could not have gained credit in the world; yet they did gain it in a remarkable manner; therefore the facts they attested are true. And the truth of the gospel evidently follows from the certainty of those facts, and is much confirmed by what has happened in the world since the first publication of it.

I shall conclude what I have to say on this subject, with a few words by way of reflection.

1. Let us gratefully acknowledge the divine goodness, in favouring us with so excellent a revelation, and confirming it to us by such ample evidence.

We should be daily adoring the God of nature, for lighting up the sun, that glorious, though imperfect image of his own unapproachable lustre; and appointing it to gild the earth with its various rays, to cheer us with its benign influences, and to guide and direct us, in our journies, and our labours. But how incomparably more valuable is that *Day spring from on high* which *has visited us*, that *Sun of righteousness*, which is *risen* upon us, *to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death*, and *to guide our feet in the way of peace**? Oh christians, for I now address myself to you, whose eyes are so happy as indeed to see, and your ears as to hear†, what reason have you for daily and hourly praise! When your minds are delighted with contemplating the riches of gospel grace, when you view with wonder and joy the harmonious contrivance of our redemption, when you feel the burden of your guilt removed, the freedom of your address to the throne of grace encouraged, and see the prospect of a fair inheritance of eternal glory opening upon you; then in the pleasing transport of your

* Mal. iv. 2. Luke i. 78, 79. † Mat. xiii. 16.

souls, borrow the joyful anthem of the Psalmist, and say, with the humblest gratitude and self-resignation, *God is the Lord, who hath given us light; bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar**. Adore *God, who* first *commanded the light to shine out of darkness*, that by the discoveries of his word and the operations of his Spirit, he *has shined in your hearts, to give* you *the knowledge of his glory*, as reflected from the face of his Son†. Let us all adore him, that this revelation hath reached us, who live in an age and country so distant from that in which it first appeared: while there are to this day, not only dark corners but regions of the earth, which are *Full of the habitations of* idolatry and *cruelty*‡.

Let me here particularly address myself to those, whose education and circumstances of life have given them opportunities of a fuller enquiry, than it was proper for me here to propose, you that know the state of those ancient or modern nations, that have been left merely to the light of unassisted reason; even to you, Sirs, who are acquainted with the history of their Gods, the rites of their priests, the tales, and even the hymns of their poets, those beautiful trifles; nay, I will add, the reasonings of their sagest philosophers, all the precarious, and all the erroneous things they have said, where religion and immortality are concerned§. I have sometimes thought, that God gave to some of the most celebrated Pagan writers that uncommon share of genius and eloquence, that they might, as it were, by their art embalm the monsters of antiquity; that so succeeding ages might see, in a more affecting view than we could otherwise have done, how weak the human mind is in its best estate, and the need, which the greatest, as well as the meanest of mankind have, of being taught by a revelation from above. Permit me to remind you, that while you are daily conversing with such monuments as these, as I know some of you are, and are also surveying the evidences of christianity, in a larger, and more distinct view, are under peculiar obligations, to be very thankful for the gospel

* Psal. cxviii. 27. † 2 Cor. iv. 6. ‡ Psal. lxxiv. 20.

* The great author I mentioned above (page 369. Note ¶) has shewn in a most convincing manner, that the whole body of the Greek philosophers disbelieved the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, though they popularly taught it as necessary to society; and held no other immortality of the soul, than what was the result of a most atheistical notion, modernly known by the name of spinozism, that the universe was God: (See Mr. Warburton's Divine Legation of Moses, book iii. Sect. 2, 3, 4.) Which surely is one of strongest proofs of the need of revelation, that the world ever saw, and the most affecting comment on the words of the learned apostle, 1 Cor. i. 21. *The world by wisdom knew not God;* but *professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.* Rom. i. 22.

yourselves, as well as to compassionate the case of those, to whom it has never been offered, or by whom it is slighted. And this leads me to another reflection;

2. What reason have we to pity those, who reject this glorious gospel, even when they have opportunities of enquiring into its clearest evidences?

Such undoubtedly there are in our own age and nation; and surely we should sometimes bestow a compassionate thought upon them, and lift up an humble prayer for them; *If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are now led captive by him at his pleasure**. We should pity the heathens and Mahometans, under their darkness and errors: But how much more deplorable is the case of those, who, though they dwell in *Emmanuel's land*, and in *the valley of vision*, turn it into *the valley of the shadow of death*, by closing their eyes against so bright a lustre, and stopping their ears against *The voice of the charmer*†? They are indeed in their own conceit the only people, and *Wisdom will die with them*‡; so that to be sure, they will scorn our pity: But who can forbear it? Is there a more melancholy thought than this, that the Son of God should have done so much to introduce and establish the gospel, and his Spirit so much to perpetuate and increase its evidence, and that after all, it should be contemptuously despised, even by creatures who are perishing without it? That the blessed Jesus, instead of being received with open arms as the great Deliverer, should either be treated as an empty name; or if acknowledged to be a real person, should then, be represented as a visionary enthusiast or a wicked impostor? for there is no other alternative? And this, not only, though I believe most frequently, by men of profligate and abandoned lives, but sometimes by persons of external morality and decency, of great humanity and sweetness of temper; for such I know are to be found amongst them, as well as men of wit and genius, of politeness and learning, of human prudence and experience in affairs. I may also add, that it is the case of some, who were the children of pious parents, who were trained up in religious exercises, who once discovered serious impressions, and gave very encouraging hopes. Alas, whither are they fallen! and whither have we reason to fear, they will at length fall! How shall we shelter those, that were

* 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. † Psal. lviii. 4, 5. ‡ Job xii. 2.

once our brethren, that are perhaps still our friends, from the awful sentence, which the gospel denounces against all that reject it, without any exception? As to the wretches, that add insult and derision to their infidelity, I tremble to think of that load of guilt, which they are bringing on themselves, and how near they approach to the unpardonable sin, if they have not committed it. For the rest, who behave in a more modest manner, it will, no doubt, be a very difficult task to convince them; and so much the rather, as some of them, by too easy a transition have renounced many of the most important principles of natural religion, nay, I might add, even the whole of it, together with the christian revelation. But the influences of divine grace are almighty; let us recommend them to these, and omit no other proper method, either of recovering those who are already seduced, or at least of securing those who are not yet infected, but may be as most of the youth are, especially in the most populous places, in imminent danger of the contagion. To this end let me add,

3. How reasonable is it, that christians should form a familiar acquaintance with the great evidences of our own common faith!

It is what we so apparently owe to the honour of God, to the interest of Christ, to the peace of our own souls, and the edification of others, that I hope, I need not urge it at large; especially considering what was said in the introduction to these discourses. In consequence of all, let it be your care to make the evidences of christianity the subject of your serious reflections, and of your frequent converse: Especially study your bibles, where there are such marks of truth and divinity to be found, that I believe, few that have familiarly known them, and have had a relish for them, were ever brought to *make shipwreck of the faith* as it is in Jesus. Above all, let it be your care to act on the rules which are here laid down; and then, you will find your faith growing in a happy proportion, and will experience the truth of our Saviour's declaration, that *If any man will* resolutely and faithfully *do his will, he shall know of the* christian *doctrine whether it be of God**. I verily believe, it is the purity of its precepts, which lies at the bottom of most men's opposition to it; or a natural pride of heart, which gives them an aversion to so humbling a scheme; or a fond affectation

* John vii. 17.

of seeming wiser than others, in rejecting what most of their neighbours do at least profess to believe. When these unhappy prejudices and conceptions are by divine grace conquered and rooted out, the evidence of truth will daily appear with an increasing lustre; as the light of the sun does, to an eye recovering from a film, with which it had been overgrown, and which before had veiled it with midnight in the midst of noon. Once more,

4. How solicitous should we be to embrace and obey that gospel, which comes attended with such abundant evidences!

I may undoubtedly address myself to most of you, my friends, and say, as Paul did to king Agrippa, *Believest thou the prophets**, and I may add, the evangelists, and the apostles? Yes, I know that you believe them; yet let me intreat and charge you, not to rest here, but attentively to examine, how far your hearts are affected, and your lives regulated by such a belief. The christian revelation is a practical thing; and it is heard, it is believed, it is professed, and even defended in vain, if it be not obeyed. Therefore do we so frequently read of *obeying the truth*, and *obeying the gospel*, as a matter of so great importance†.

In this gospel, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; but it is revealed with redoubled terror against that audacious sinner, *who holds the truth in unrighteousness*‡. In this gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted, both *As a Prince and a Saviour*§; and it is not with impunity, that the impenitent rebel can reject his yoke, and trample on his blood: For *If he that despised Moses's law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment*, than even a capital execution, *must they be thought worthy*, who have poured contempt on such a sovereign, and on such a Redeemer‖.

Oh let it be most secretly and frequently recollected, that this gospel is the touch-stone, by which you are another day to be tried; the balance, in which an impartial judge will weigh you; and must on the whole prove your everlasting triumph, or your everlasting torment. The blessed God did not introduce it with such solemn notice, such high expectation, such pompous

* Acts xxvi. 27. † Rom. ii. 8. vi. 17. Gal. iii. 1. 2 Thess. i. 8. 1 Pet. i. 22. iv. 17. To which we may add, John iii. 36. where ο απειθων τω υιω, *he that is disobedient to the Son* is with great propriety opposed to ο πιστευων εις τον υιον, *he that believeth on the Son*. See Family Expositor, note i.

‡ Rom. i. 18. § Acts v. 31. ‖ Heb. x. 28, 29.

miracles, such awful sanctions, that men might reject, or dishonour it, at pleasure: But it will certainly be found, to the greatest and meanest, of those that hear it, *A savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death**.

Let it therefore be your immediate care, to enquire which of these it is like to prove to your souls; since it is so far from being a vain thing, that it is really *your* very *life*†. If it has hitherto been despised, and that blessed Redeemer, in whom it so apparently centres, has been neglected; remember, that all which has been said in confirmation of its truth, does but in effect prove, that the hand-writing of God himself is set to the sentence of your eternal condemnation. Oh therefore allow not yourselves a moment's rest, till you have with humble submission applied to his throne, while yet there is hope that it may be reversed,

And as for you, my brethren, who have *Received Christ Jesus the Lord*, be exhorted to *walk in him*‡; since it is the design of his gospel to *Teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly*§, and this, not only as you have so comfortable an assurance, that *Your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord*‖, but as it will be, on the whole, the most effectual method you can take in your respective stations to promote the gospel. If you indeed honour it and love it, and desire it may be propagated in the world, let it be your care, not only to defend it by your tongues, but to adorn it by your lives; and in the words of that great champion in this sacred cause, *Be blameless and harmless, the children of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining amongst them as lights in the world*, and so *holding forth the word of life*¶; and perhaps it may serve, not only to entertain their eyes with wonder and glory, but to *guide their feet into the way of peace*, and may engage them also to join with you in *Glorifying your Father which is in heaven***. Amen!

* 2 Cor. ii. 16. † Deut. xxxii. 47. ‡ Col. ii. 6. § Tit. ii. 12.
‖ 1 Cor. xv. 58. ¶ Phil. ii. 15, 16. ** Mat. v. 16.

PRACTICAL DISCOURSES

ON

REGENERATION,

IN TEN SERMONS;

ON THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:

I. The character of the unregenerate.
II. III. The nature of regeneration.
IV. V. VI. The necessity and importance of it.
VII. The divine influences necessary to produce it.
VIII. The various methods in which those influences operate.
IX. Directions to the awakened sinner.
X. An address to the regenerate.

PREACHED AT NORTHAMPTON,

And published at the earnest Request of many that heard them.

Ικανη παραμυθια των πονων, και παντων μειζων, οταν εαυτω συνειδηναι δυναται
ΠΡΟΣ ΑΡΕΣΚΕΙΑΝ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ συντιθεις και ρυθμιζων την Διδασκαλιαν.
Chrysost. de. Sacerd. Lib. v. § 7.

PREFACE.

It is undoubtedly the duty of every wise and good man to be forming schemes for the service of God and his fellow-creatures in future years, if he be continued to them; and it will be his prudence to do it early in life, that he may be gradually preparing to execute them in the most advantageous manner he can. But while *A man's heart* is thus *devising his way, the Lord directeth his steps.* And as many such schemes will probably be left unfinished at death, which will quickly come to *break off our purposes and the thoughts of our hearts;* so it is not improbable that they who humbly and obediently follow the leadings of divine providence and grace, may often find themselves called out on a sudden to services which, but a little before, were quite unthought of by them.

This has been the case with me in most of the sermons I have published, of which very few were composed with any view to the press; and it is most remarkably so with respect to these on Regeneration. Besides many other excellent persons, my much honoured friend Dr. Wright has handled the subject in so judicious and lively a manner, and through the great goodness of God to us, so many thousands of his treatise upon it are dispersed in all parts of our land, that I could hardly have believed any one who had told me I should thus have resumed it; nor had I the least intention of doing it, when I began that course of lectures which I now offer to my reader's perusal.

I did indeed think it necessary last year to treat the subject more largely than I had ever done before, knowing in the general how important it is, and observing that several controversies had about that time been raised concerning it, which (though I do not judge it necessary to mention the particulars of them) I was ready to fear, might have had an ill influence to unsettle men's minds, and either to lead them into some particular errors, or into a general apprehension that it was a mere point of speculation, about which it was not necessary to form any judgment at all*.

That these discourses might be more generally useful, I determined to preach them on Lord's-day evenings, that those of my neighbours who were not my stated hearers might, if they thought proper, have an opportunity of attending them: And accordingly they were attended to the last with uncommon diligence; a great many such persons, of different pursuasions and communions, making up a part of the auditory. As practical instruction and improvement was the main thing I had in view, I knew it was necessary to make my discourses as plain, as free, and as serious as I could. But before I had finished near half of my scheme, several of my hearers earnestly requested that the sermons might be published: And the request grew more extensive and importunate every week, with this additional circumstance (which I much regarded) that some very pious and judicious friends at a distance, being providentially brought to the hearing of some of these lectures, strongly concurred in the desire; expressing a very cheerful hope, that the reading of what they had heard might be useful in distant parts of the land, to which they assured me they would endeavour to spread them as opportunity might offer. As the advice of several of my brethren in the ministry was joined with all this, I thought myself bound in duty at length to comply; which I was the rather encouraged to do from

* See Mr Hebden's Appendix to his late Discourse on Regeneration.

the several instances in which I had reason to believe the divine blessing had in some measure attended these sermons from the pulpit, and had made them the means of producing and advancing the change they described and enforced.

On these considerations, as soon as I returned from that long journey on which I set out the day after these lectures were concluded, I applied myself to recollect the substance of them as well as I could, from the short hints I had written of them, with the assistance of those notes which some of my friends had taken after me in characters. Some things are, perhaps, omitted, though I believe but very few; some contracted, and some enlarged; but my hearers will find them in the main what they heard. It cost me more labour than I was aware, from such materials, to reduce them into their present form; and I hope the multitude of my other business will be allowed as an apology, if I proceeded in them slower than some might expect.

I shall leave it to my reader to observe for himself the manner and method in which I have handled my subject, without giving him a particular view of it here; only must beg leave to tell him, in the general, that I hope he will find I have not presumed so far on the sublimity of my subject, as to talk without determinate ideas; for which reason I have omitted many phrases, used particularly of late by some pious and worthy persons, because I freely own, that as I cannot find them in my bible, so neither can I understand their exact meaning; and it seems very improper to embarrass such plain discourses as these with a language, which, not being thoroughly master of, I may chance to misapply, supposing those phrases to be really more proper than I can at present apprehend they are. I have endeavoured to keep to one idea of Regeneration, which I take to be that which the scripture suggests: By Regeneration I mean "a prevailing disposition of the soul to universal holiness, produced and cherished by the influences of God's Spirit on our hearts, operating in a manner suitable to the constitution of our nature, as rational and accountable creatures." If this be (as I think I have proved at large that it is) the scriptural notion of it, it will follow, that nothing which may be found where this is not, or which may not be found where this is, can be Regeneration in the scripture sense; which is that sense in which we are much more concerned, than we are in that to which any human writers, whether ancient or modern, may think proper to apply it.

If the doctrine which I have endeavoured in the whole course of these sermons to confirm and illustrate by the word of God, be in one form or another generally taught by my brethren in the ministry, of whatever denomination, I rejoice in it for their own sakes, as well as for that of the people under their care. I am very little inclined to contend about technical phrases of human invention, which have with equal frailty been idolized by some, and anathematized by others. We shall, I hope, learn more and more to *bear one another's burdens*, and to study the kindest interpretations which the words of each other will admit. But I must take the liberty to say, I am in my conscience persuaded that this view of things which is here proposed, though perhaps not very fashionable, is in the general so edifying, and so naturally leads to the frequent review of many other important doctrines of christianity which are closely connected with it, that I am well satisfied it will be our wisdom to adhere to it, and to make it very familiar to our own minds, and to those of our hearers. Nor can I imagine that any variety in the idioms of different languages, or the customs of different ages and nations, can be a sufficient reason for bringing scripture phrases into disuse, while we keep to the original ideas signified by them. There seems to be a peculiar felicity in them to express divine truth; and they will undoubtedly be found the safest vehicle of religious knowledge, and the surest bond of union among christians; while, however we may differ in other matters, we so generally agree in acknowledging that our bibles contain the oracles of God.

Let us therefore, who under different denominations are honoured with the ministry of the *Everlasting gospel*, agree, for a while at least, to suspend our debates

upon less necessary subjects, that we may with united efforts concur in prosecuting that great design for which the gospel was revealed, the Spirit given, and our office instituted. And since it is so evident that irreligion has grown upon us, while we have been attending to other, and to be sure smaller matters, let us by a plain, serious, and zealous way of preaching the most vital truths of christianity, joined with a diligent inspection of the souls committed to our care, try what can be done towards preventing the progress of this growing apostacy, and recovering the ground we have already lost. Ignorant and prejudiced people may perhaps accuse us of bigotry or enthusiasm; but let us do our best to convince them of their error by the candour of our temper, and the prudence of our conduct; and remember, that as Chrysostom excellently speaks in those lively words which I have inserted in the title page, "It is a sufficient consolation for our labours, and far more than an equivalent for all, if we may have a testimony in our consciences, that we compose and regulate our discourses in such a manner as may be approved by God, in whose name we speak."

Northampton, Nov. 7, 1741.

POSTSCRIPT.

TO what I have said in the conclusion of the first sermon concerning the proper import of the word regeneration, I beg leave to add the following remarks for the farther satisfaction of some worthy persons, who think it may be convenient to state the matter a little more particularly.

I acknowledge that many learned and pious divines have taught and contended, that Regeneration does, in the strictest propriety of speech, signify baptism. So that no unbaptized person, how well disposed soever, can properly be said to be regenerated; whereas that title may justly be given to all who have been baptized, how destitute soever they might have been of christian faith and holiness when they received the ordinance, or how grossly soever they may since have forfeited the final blessings of a regenerate state. Dr. Waterland has stated this matter at large in his laboured and ingenious treatise on the subject, which is the best I know on this side of the question. And though this would be a very improper place to enter on a critical examination of that piece, I will briefly touch on the chief arguments which he, or others in his sentiments, have urged in vindication of this favourite notion. So far as I can recollect, what they say is capable of being reduced to two heads;—that christian antiquity uses the word in this sense;—and that there are passages of scripture which authorize such an application of it.

As to the first of these, I readily own that the word has this sense in the generality of the christian writers, from about the middle of the second century, though I think not so universally as some have concluded*: But I think it easy to account for such an use of it among them. For in the earliest ages of the church, persons were generally baptized as soon as they were converted to the cordial belief of christianity; and therefore the time of their conversion and that of their baptism might naturally enough be spoken of as one: And as this was a period when they did as it were come into a new world, it is no wonder that the action by which they testified a change so lately made, should be put for that change itself. Just as illumination also among the ancients signifies baptism: Not to intimate that the grand illumination of the mind was made by this rite, or at the time of it; for that would be supposing the person in darkness when he embraced the gospel, and determined to be baptized: But because it was taken for granted, and that very justly in those days, that every one savingly enlightened would soon be baptized, that so he might be regularly joined to the society of enlightened or regenerated persons, that is, to the christian church: Which no doubt had the best right of any

* Clemens Alexandrinus, so often, and to be sure reasonably, quoted on the other side, plainly uses the word for a change of character by true repentance; (Strom. Lib. ii. p. 425.) where speaking of a penitent harlot, he says, "that being born again by conversion, or a change in her temper and behaviour, she has the regeneration of life:" αναγεννηθεισα κατα την επιστροφην τα βια παλιγγενεσιαν εχει ζωης.

body of men in the world to that title, though in its purest state it contained some ignorant and wicked members. In a word, a man by baptism solemnly professed himself a christian; and as it was generally the first over act by which his believing the gospel could be publicly and generally known, and was also supposed to be very near the time of his inward conversion, they dated his regeneration, that is, his happy change, as that word used to signify even among the heathen*, from that time. We own therefore that these ancient christians, of whom I always think and speak with great respect, had a very good excuse for this method of speaking: But whether they were perfectly accurate in this, and whether they did not recede from the scripture use of the word, may be matter of farther enquiry.

As to the arguments from scripture in support of the interpretation I oppose, they are taken partly from particular places; but chiefly, as I apprehend, from the general tenor of it, in which christians are spoken of as regenerated.

The particular texts are John iii. 5. and Tit. iii. 5. on which much of the stress of this controversy is laid; but on considering them attentively, I find nothing in either of them to lead us to think baptism the regeneration spoken of there.

As to the former of them, John iii. 5. When our Lord says, *Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*; it is, (after all the contempt with which that interpretation has been treated) very possible he may mean, by a well known figure, to express one idea by both those clauses, that is, the purifying influences of the Spirit cleansing the mind as water does the body: As elsewhere to be *Baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire;* Mat. iii. 11. signifies to be baptized by the Spirit operating like fire. But if there is indeed a reference to baptism in these words, which I own I am much inclined to believe, it will by no means follow that baptism is regeneration. On that supposition, I still think the sense of the passage must be that which I have given in my paraphrase on it. (Family Expositor.) "Whosoever would become a regular member of the kingdom of God, must not only be baptized, but as ever he desires to share in its spiritual and eternal blessings, must experience the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit on his soul, to cleanse it from the power of corruption, and to animate and quicken it to a spiritual and divine life." It is granted therefore, that how excellent soever any man's character is, he must be baptized before he can be looked upon as completely a member of the church of Christ; and that, in general, *being born of the Spirit*, he will also be solicitous that he may be born of water, and so *fulfil all righteousness*. But it will never follow from hence, that being born of water and born of the Spirit are the same thing. The text rather implies they are different; and I think every body must own, they may be actually separate.

* It is well known that Cicero expresses the happy change made in his state, when restored from his banishment, by this word. Cic. ad Attic. Lib. vi. Epist. 6. The Greeks expressed by it the doctrine of the Brachmans, in which they affirmed our entering on a new state of being after death. Clem. Alex. Strom. Lib. iii. p. 451. And the Stoics used it to denote their expected renovation of the world after successive conflagrations. Marc. Antonin. Medit. Lib. xi. §. 1. v. 13. x. 7. See Lucian, Oper. p. 532. Euseb. Præp. Evang. ex Numen. Lib. xv. Cap. 19. Phil. Jud. de Mundi Immort. p. 940, 951, and in many other places. And so the fathers often use it to signify the resurrection which christians expect. See Euseb. Eccl. Hist. Lib. v. Cap. 1. in fin. Compare Matt. xix. 28. and the note there: Fam. Expos.

Nothing therefore can be more absurd than to infer from this text, that if there be two persons, one of which is born of the Spirit, and not of water; another of water, and not of the Spirit; the latter, that is, the wicked man who has perhaps with some iniquitous design been baptized, may properly be said to be regenerated, or born of God, and consequently to be an *Heir of God;* Rom. viii. 17. rather than a truly religious man who has not yet been baptized, either through want of opportunity, or through some unhappy mistake, as to the nature and design, or the perpetuity and obligations of that ordinance. Now this I take to be precisely the question, and must declare that when a baptized person is destitute of true religion, that birth which he had by water, seems to me as it were an evanescent thing, or a thing which disappears as unworthy the mention; and that it must be therefore most safe and advisable, as well as most agreeable to the scripture sense, to appropriate the title of regenerate persons to those sanctified by divine grace, rather than to use it of all who are baptized.

As to the text in Titus, chap. iii. 5. where God is said to save us *by the washing of regeneration,* or, as some earnestly contend it should be rendered, by the laver of regeneration: I might answer, that as that interpretation is by no means necessary*, it cannot be proved that baptism is here designed, though I acknowledge there may be a graceful allusion to it: The apostle may mean, we are saved by God's washing our hearts by his sanctifying Spirit, a phrase so often used in the Old Testament, and thereby making us his children: And in this sense it might have been used, though baptism had never been instituted. But granting, as I have done in the beginning of the seventh sermon, that Λαβρον may be rendered laver, and that baptism may be the laver referred to; and that "there is indeed an allusion to the washing new-born children;" as Mr. Mede in his Diatribe on this text contends; I think this text will be so far from proving that St. Paul meant to call baptism Regeneration, that it will prove the contrary: For regeneration itself, and the laver of regeneration, cannot be the same thing; and whatever Tertullian and other ancients may fancifully talk of our being generated like little fishes in the water, in a weak allusion to the technical word ΙΧΘΥΣ, common sense will see how absurd it would be to apply this to a child, and will teach us rather to argue, that as children must be born before they can be washed, so they must be regenerated before the washing of regeneration, that is, the washing which belongs to their new birth, can be applied to them. But on the whole, as washing an infant refers to its pollution, and no pollution attends our regeneration as such, I am more and more inclined to think there is no reference at all here to a laver, or to the washing new-born children; and therefore, that this washing and the renewing of the Holy Ghost are exegetical, and that the latter clause might be rendered, *even* the renewing, &c. which makes the text decisive for the sense in which I use the word.

* The original is δια λαυτρε παλιγγενεσιας. Now it is certain, the seventy use another word, that is, Λαυτηρ, to signify laver, Exod. xxx. 18. 28. xxxi. 9; and I think, so far as I have observed, every where else: And Λαυτρον (St. Paul's word here) is used where it cannot signify laver, for the water in which sheep are washed, Cant. iv. 2, and for a large quantity of water in which an adult person was washed or bathed, Eph. v. 26. And this remark quite overthrows all the argument from this text, if any argument would follow from rendering it laver; but I think I need not urge this.

After all then, if any argument can be deduced from scripture in favour of the manner of speaking now in debate, it must be from the general tenor of it; according to which it seems that all who are members of the visible church are spoken of as regenerate; from which it may be inferred, with some plausible probability at least, that baptism, by which they are admitted into that society, may be called regeneration: And I am ready to believe, as I hinted above, that this was the chief reason why the ancients so often used the word in the sense I am now opposing.

Now with relation to this, I desire it may be recollected, that when christianity first appeared in the world, it was attended with such discouragements, as made the very profession of it, in a great measure, a test of men's characters. The Apostles therefore, knowing the number of hypocrites to be comparatively very small, generally take no notice of them, but address themselves to whole bodies of christians, as if they were truly what they professed to be. Just as our Lord Jesus Christ, though he knew the wickedness of Judas, often addresses himself to the whole body of his Apostles, as if they were all his faithful servants, and makes gracious declarations and promises to the whole society, which could by no means be applicable to this one corrupt and wretched member of it; telling them, for instance, that they should share in his final triumph, and *Sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* Mat. xix. 28.

This is therefore the true key to all those passages in which christians are, in the general, said to be adopted, sanctified, justified, &c. as well as regenerated. The apostles had reason, in the judgment of charity, to think thus of by far the greatest part of them; and therefore they speak to them all, as in such a happy state. And agreeably to this, we find not only such privileges, but also such characters, ascribed to christians in general, as were only applicable to such of them as were christians indeed. Thus all the Corinthians are spoken of by the apostle Paul, as *Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,* 1 Cor. i. 7. and all the Ephesians, and all the Colossians, as having *Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love to all the saints,* Eph. i. 15. Col. i. 4. and all the Philippians, as having a *good work begun in them,* which Paul was persuaded God would perfect, Phil. i. 6. and all the Thessalonians, as remarkable for their *Work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope,* 1 Thess. i. 3. though it evidently appears there were persons in several of these churches who behaved much amiss, and to whom, had he been particularly addressing to each of them alone, he could not by any means have used such language. On the like principles Peter, when addressing to all the christians in *Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia,* and *Bithynia,* speaks of the whole aggregate of them, 1 Pet. i. 8. as loving an unseen Saviour, and amidst all their tribulations rejoicing in him *With joy unspeakable and full of glory;* though probably there were some weak and dejected christians among them, and undoubtedly in so large an extent of country, in which there were such a vast number of churches, not a few, who, as our Lord afterwards expresses it of some of them, had only *A name to live, while they were dead,* Rev. iii. 1. in which passage, by the way, our Lord uses the same figure, and describes the whole body by the character of those who made the greater part of it.

I state the matter thus particularly, because I think this obvious remark is a sufficient answer to what is most peculiar and important in a late discourse, consisting of near 130 quarto pages, and intitled, A Key to the Apostolic Writings, &c. prefixed by the Rev. Mr. Taylor of Norwich to his late Paraphrase and Notes on the Romans. I think what I have briefly advanced

here, will much more effectually answer the end of fixing the true sense of the scripture phrases in question. And I cannot forbear saying, that to determine the sense of the words *called, redeemed, sanctified*, &c. when applied to the christian church, by that in which they are used in Moses and the Prophets with respect to the whole people of Israel, seems to me as unreasonable, as it would be to maintain, that the dimensions, the strength, and the beauty of a body, are to be most exactly estimated by looking on its shadow.

Yet on this evidently weak and mistaken principle the learned and ingenious author, referred to above, ventures not only to attempt an entire alteration in the generally-received strain of theological discourses, but to throw out a censure, which, considering its extent and its severity, must either be very terrible, or very pitiable. He not only seems to think, if I understand him right, that we were all regenerated (if at all) as well as justified, in those of our parents who were first converted from idolatry to christianity (Key, §. 81, 82. and 246.) as indeed he expressly says, "that we are born in a justified," and therefore undoubtedly, if the word is to be retained, in a regenerate "state:" But he presumes to say, that such doctrines as have been almost universally taught and received among christians, concerning "Justification, regeneration, redemption, &c. have quite taken away the very ground of the christian life, the grace of God, and have left no object for the faith of a sinner to work upon". §. 357. And hereupon, lest it should be forgot, he repeats it in the same section, that to represent it as "the subject of doubtful enquiry, trial, and examination, whether we have an interest in Christ, whether we are in a state of pardon, whether we be adopted" (and by consequence, to be sure, whether we be regenerated) "is" (as the Antinomians I imagine would also say) "to make our justification, as it invests us in those blessings, to be of works, and not by faith alone;" and, as was just before said in the same words, "to take away the very ground of the christian life, the grace of God, and to leave no object for the faith of a sinner to act upon." And this way of stating things, which has so generally prevailed, is joined with the wickedness and contentions of professing christians, as a third cause of that disregard to the gospel which is so common in the present day.

Now as no book can fall more directly under this censure, than this of mine, in which it is the business of the three first sermons to direct professing christians in an enquiry, whether they be or be not in a regenerate state; I thought it not improper in this postscript briefly to acquaint my reader with the principles on which I continue to think the view in which I have put the matter to be rational and scriptural*, and do still in my conscience judge it

* For the full proof of this, that it is the most scriptural sense, I must desire the reader diligently to examine, and seriously to consider, the several texts which are quoted in the following discourses; for it would swell this postscript too much to enumerate them all here, and to give them a critical examination. Let it still be remembered, that to be regenerated, and to be born of God, are equivalent phrases: And with this remark, let any one that can do it paraphrase all the passages referred to, in two different views; first putting the word baptism for regeneration, and baptized persons for born of God; and then substituting our definition of regeneration or of a regenerate person, instead of the words themselves: And I cannot but think he will be struck with that demonstration, which will, as it were, emerge of itself upon such a trial. And I must add, that if he look into the context of many of these passages, he will at the same time see how utterly ungrounded it is to assert, as some have done, "that regeneration is only used when applied to Jewish converts to chris-

far preferable to what the advocates of baptismal regeneration on the one hand, or Mr. Taylor on the other, would introduce. It seems to me, that the points in dispute with him are much more important than our debates with them, as a much greater number of scriptures are concerned, and the whole tenor of our ministerial addresses would be much more sensibly affected. Had I leisure to discuss the matter more largely with this gentleman, I should think it might be an important service to the gospel of Christ. I hope it will be undertaken by some abler hand*; and shall, in the mean time, go on preaching and writing in the manner so solemnly condemned, with no apprehension from the discharge of all this overloaded artillery, except it be what I feel for the zealous engineer himself, and a few other friends who may chance to stand nearer him than in prudence they ought.

tianity, referring to their former birth from Abraham;" a notion so fully confuted by our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus, John iii. 3, & seq. by Tit. iii. 5. and by 1 Pet. i. 3. 23. ii. 2. when compared with 1 Pet. i. 14. iv. 3. which prove that the apostle there wrote to societies, of which the greater part had before been idolatrous Gentiles, that I think it quite superfluous to discuss it more largely here.

Northampton, June 13, 1745.

*This has been effected, virtually, in the most masterly and elaborate manner, by Mr. JONATHAN EDWARDS of New England, in his Treatise on Original Sin, in answer to Dr. Taylor. The subject, indeed is not Regeneration, but Original Sin; yet here the reader will find the whole of Taylor's Key demolished by sound criticism and close reasoning.—E.

SERMON I.

ON REGENERATION.

Of the Character of the Unregenerate.

Eph. ii. 1, 2. *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.*

AMONG all the various trusts which men can repose in each other, hardly any appears to me more solemn and tremendous, than the direction of their sacred time, and especially of those hours which they spend in the exercise of public devotion. These seasons take up so small a part of our lives, when compared with that which the labours and recreations of them demand; and so much depends upon their being managed aright; that we, who are called to assist you in the employment and improvement of them, can hardly be too solicitous, that we discharge the trust, in a manner which we may answer to God and to you. If this thought dwell upon the mind with due weight, it will have some sensible influence upon our discourses to you, as well as on the strain of those addresses which we present to the throne of grace in your name, and on your account. We shall not be over anxious about the order of words, the elegance of expression, or the little graces of composition or delivery; but shall study to speak on the most important subjects, and to handle them with such gravity and seriousness, with such solemnity and spirit, as may, through the divine blessing, be most likely to penetrate the hearts of our hearers, to awaken those that are entirely unconcerned about religion, and to animate and assist those, who, being already acquainted with it, desire to make continual advances, which will be the case of every truly good man.

It is my earnest prayer for myself, and for my brethren in the ministry of all denominations, that we may, in this respect, approve our wisdom and integrity to God, and *Commend our-*

*selves to the consciences of all men**. It is our charge, as we shall answer it another day to *The God of the spirits of all flesh*, to use our most prudent and zealous endeavours, to make men truly wise and good, virtuous and happy: But to this purpose, it is by no means sufficient to content ourselves, merely with attempting to reform the immoralities and irregularities of their lives, and to bring them to an external behaviour, decent, honourable, and useful. An undertaking like this, while the inward temper is neglected, even when it may seem most effectual, will be but like painting the face of one who is ready to die, or labouring to repair a ruinous house, by plaistering and adorning its walls, while its foundations are decayed. There is an awful passage in Ezekiel to this purpose, which I hope we shall often recollect†: *Wo to the foolish prophets,—because they have seduced my people, saying, peace, when there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar, say unto them that daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall:—Thus saith the Lord God, I will even rent it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hail-stones in my fury to consume it: So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.*

If there be any, in one body of christians, or another, that abet men's natural disposition to flatter themselves *in a way that is not good*, by encouraging them to hope for salvation, because they were regularly baptized in their infancy; because they have diligently attended on public worship, in its established, or its separate forms; or merely because they do no body any harm, but are rather kind and helpful to others; or because their faith is orthodox, their transports of affection warm, or their assurance confident; I pray God to awaken them by the power of his grace, before they are consumed, with their hearers, in the ruins of their deceitful building. Those of you who are my stated hearers can witness for me, that in this respect, *I have delivered my own soul*‡. It has been the steady tenor of my doctrine among you, that our hope and confidence must be in Christ, and not in ourselves; and that, if we desire to be interested in the righteousness he has wrought out, and in the blessings he has purchased by his sacred blood, we must be ex-

* 2 Cor. iv. 2. † Ezek. xiii. 10—14. ‡ Ezek. xxxiii. 9.

perimentally acquainted with the work of God's renewing grace upon our souls, during the inward distempers of our degenerate hearts, and transforming us into the image of his holiness: This is what we are taught in scripture to call by the name of regeneration; and considering how much the subject is neglected by some, and I fear I may add, misrepresented and disguised by others, I apprehend I shall profitably employ an evening-hour for several succeeding sabbaths, in giving a larger account than I have yet done, of the scripture-doctrine on this important subject, in its various parts. It shall be my care in the series of these discourses, as God shall enable me, to *Speak the words of truth and soberness**; and I intreat you to have recourse *To the law and to the testimony*†, that you may judge of the truth and weight of what I say. I desire not to be regarded any farther, than I produce evidence from reason and scripture: But so far as we are disregarded, while we have the concurrent testimony of both, our hearers must see to it; and their danger will then be proportionable to the importance of those truths, which their negligence, or their prejudice, engage them either to reject, or to overlook.

The plan on which I intend to proceed in the course of these lectures, is this:

I. I will endeavour to describe the character of those, whom we may properly call persons in an unregenerate state.

II. I will describe the nature of that change, which may properly be called regeneration, or conversion.

III. I will shew at large the absolute necessity of this change, and the consequent misery of those that are strangers to it.

IV. I shall endeavour to prove the reality and necessity of the divine influences on the mind, in the production of such a change.

V. I shall describe some of those various methods, by which God is pleased to operate in the production of this holy and important work.

VI. I shall propose some advices to those who are already awakened, as to the method in which they are to seek renewing and converting grace. After which,

VII. I shall conclude these discourses with an address to those who have experienced this happy change, as to the man-

* Acts xxvi. 25. † Isa. viii. 20.

ner in which they ought to be affected with such a series of sermons as this, and the improvement they should make of what they hear, and what they have felt agreeable to it.

I should be peculiarly inexcusable, if I entered upon such a subject, without earnest and importunate prayers to the fountain of light, grace, and holiness, that while you hear of this important doctrine, you may have that experimental knowledge of it, without which such discourses will indeed seem obscure and enthusiastical, according to the degree in which they are rational and spiritual. I shall only add, that these lectures will take their rise from a variety of texts, which I shall not according to my usual method, largely open and dilate upon, but only touch on them as so many mottos to the respective sermons to which they are prefixed.

As I intend not philosophical essays, but plain, practical, and popular addresses, I shall begin,

First, With describing the character of those, whom we may properly call unconverted and unregenerate persons.

It is absolutely necessary that I should do this, that you may respectively know your own personal concern in what is further to be laid before you in the process of these lectures.

Now you have the general character of such, in the words of my text; and a very sad one it is: They are represented, as *dead in trespasses and sins*, utterly indisposed both for the actions and enjoyments of the spiritual and divine life; as *walking according to the course of this world*, a sad intimation that it was the state of the generality of mankind; nay, *according to the Prince of the power of the air*, that impure and wicked *Spirit, who works*, or exerts his energy, *in the children of disobedience*, that is, in those who reject and despise the gospel; in which it is implied, and a dreadful implication it is, that the course and conduct of those who reject the gospel, is according to the desire and instigation of the prince of darkness: They are going on as the devil himself would have them, and chuse that path for themselves, which he chuses for them, as leading them to most certain and most aggravated ruin.

And who are these unhappy persons? Surely there must be some of them among us: For who can flatter himself, that in so numerous an assembly, the course of all is different from that of the world; and that all have happily triumphed over the artifices of that accursed spirit, who is, by God's righteous permission, become its prince, while it continues in its apostate

state? I shall however think it a very happy point gained, if I could convince any of you, who are justly liable to that conviction, that you are the men; if I could, as it were, render visible to your eyes, those subtil, yet strongly complicated chains, in which Satan is binding you, and by which he is drawing you on to eternal ruin; that you might *Recover yourselves out of the snare of the devil, who are led captive by him at his pleasure**.

I am this evening to describe the character of unregenerate men. But I cannot pretend to do it in all the variety of circumstances which may attend it. I shall therefore mention only some particulars which are most important, and which most certainly demonstrate a person to be of that wretched number. There are a great variety of countenances in the human species; yet the principal features in all are the same, though their proportion and lineaments may differ: And I apprehend, the characters which I am now to lay down, will most of them suit every unregenerate person, though they may appear in various persons in different degrees and different instances. I shall chiefly lay down these characters in negatives, as I apprehend it is the safest way: and only would observe, that you may easily imagine, that I speak only of the adult; for I would cautiously avoid intangling this discourse, with what relates purely to the case of infants, *lest satan should get an advantage over us*, and turn that into an occasion to amuse curiosity, which I humbly hope, under the influence of the Spirit of God, will be a means of awakening conviction, and of breaking that delusive peace, in which like *the strong man armed* he keeps his vassals, till the fatal hour come which is to complete their ruin.

To wave the formality of laboured demonstrations in a case which admits of such easy evidence, I shall go upon this obvious principle in the whole of my reasoning: "That to be regenerate, and to be born of God, are in scripture terms of the same import; and consequently, that whatever temper and disposition is in scripture declared to be inconsistent with the character of a child of God, must necessarily denominate a man an unregenerate person." And one would think this principle could hardly be disputed, since all that allow of regeneration at all, in a christian sense, seem to understand by it that change, whatever it is, by which a person is made a child of God, and by consequence an heir of heaven.

* 2 Tim. ii. 26.

Now on this principle, you may take the marks of an unregenerate person in such particulars as these; and let those, whose consciences own them, hear and tremble.

1. The soul "that never seriously enquired into its spiritual state," is, beyond all doubt, an unregenerate soul.

The apostle earnestly presses it upon the christians to whom he wrote, that they should diligently *Examine themselves whether they were in the faith* *: And he who has entirely neglected to do it, seems to express, not merely a forgetfulness of religion, but even a contempt of it too. Nevertheless be it known unto you, Sirs, that an humble return to God, and a cordial dedication of soul to his service, is not so slight an act of a man's life, that it should pass without any observation in doing it, or any serious reflection on having done it. Religion is a deliberate thing; it brings a man seriously to *Consider his* ways, that he may *turn his feet to God's commandments*† ; to *Search and try them*, that he may *turn again unto the Lord*‡. A good man is so impressed with the thoughts of God, and of eternity, that perhaps he is rather ready to be over anxiously afraid and suspicious, in a matter of so great importance; and therefore will review, on the one hand, the plan of salvation that God has laid down in his word, and on the other, the correspondency to it that he may discover in his own soul. And if there are any of you that have never been thus employed, any that have never *Separated yourselves* a while from other employments, *that* you might *seek and intermeddle with this* divine *wisdom*§, you are assuredly strangers to it. If there are any of you, that have never studied God's word, to learn his will from thence; that have never attended to sermons, that you might try yourselves by them, and if possible, carry home something of the chief of what you hear, to assist your retired and more diligent enquiries; you may now come to a very quick conclusion, and before you leave this place, yea, before I proceed to any further particulars, you may set it down as the memorable beginning of these lectures, and of this discoure, "I am already proved to be an unregenerate creature: I am *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*‖." Nay, you may add, that there are perhaps thousands of those that are yet unregenerate sinners, who have not been so careless and so insensible as you. For indeed, Sirs, a man may begin an examination, and start back from the prosecution of it, before it is brought to any

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5. † Psal. cxix. 59. ‡ Lam. iii. 40. § Prov. xviii. 1. ‖ Acts viii. 23.

important issue; or trying himself by false characters, he may come to a conclusion, which will be so much the more dangerous, as it has been the more deliberate. For the sake of such therefore, I add,

2. The soul "that is not deeply convinced of its guilt before God, and desirous to seek deliverance from it by the Lord Jesus Christ," is still in an unregenerate state.

All the promises of God's paternal favour do certainly imply the promise of forgiveness; and you well know, that these are appropriated to such as humble themselves before God: And that humbling which is merely external, and implies no deep sense of inward guilt, can pass for very little with that God, who *searches the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men**.

The scripture assures us, that *Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God*†; and nothing can be more certain from the whole tenor of it, than that *he that believes not, shall be damned*‡; and surely a state of damnation is not, and cannot be, a state of regeneration. But what is this faith in Christ? Is it no more than a bare notional persuason, that he is the Son of God? If this were all, the *Devils* themselves *believe*§; and many were the instances, in which you know that they confessed it, and trembled before him. You cannot then be ignorant, that the faith, to which the promises of salvation are made, is a faith, which receives the Lord Jesus Christ in all his offices; which trusts his atonement, as well as admits his revelation; and flies to him for righteousness and life. And how can that man seek righteousness from Christ, who is insensible of his own guilt? Or how can he depend upon him for life, who is not aware that he is under a sentence of death and condemnation?

But imagine not you are secure, because you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners. If that acknowledgment be slight and formal, it shews you are strangers to the operation of that Spirit, whose office it is to *convince* men *of sin*‖. If you have not been made sensible of the pollution of your hearts, as well as the rebellion of your lives: if you have not received as it were a *sentence of death in* yourselves, and submitted to that sentence as righteous, though ever so dreadful; if you have not been made to loath and *Abhor yourselves, and to repent in dust and ashes*¶; if you have not *Laid your hand on your mouth***, and *your mouth in the dust*††, *crying out, unclean, unclean*‡‡; and in this

*Jer. xvii. 10. † 1 John v. 1. ‡ Mark xvi. 16. § Jam. ii. 19. ‖ John xvi. 8.
¶ Job xlii. 5. ** Mich. vii. 16. †† Lam. iii. 29. ‡‡ Lev. xiii. 46.

sense at least, adopted that pathetic complaint, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me*!* It is a certain sign, that *Sin* still *reigns in your mortal bodies*†, and is unto this day *Bringing forth fruit unto death*‡.

3. The soul "that is unconcerned about the favour of God, and communion with him," is still in an unregenerate state.

Common reason may tell you, that a soul destitute of the love of God, can never be the object of his complacential regards; and that it is impossible you should love him, while you are unconcerned about his favour, and habitually indifferent to converse with him. You believe, there is a God; you acknowledge, that he is the great benefactor of the whole world; you know, your happiness depends upon his favour; you wish therefore, that you may enjoy it; that is, you wish, that some way or other you may be happy, rather than miserable. But let conscience say, whether you have ever felt, that *In his favour is life*§? whether you have ever known, what it is to cry out with intenseness and ardour of soul, *Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon me*‖? Alas, Sirs, had you been sons, God would have *Sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts*¶: And if this be not the sincere, if it be not the habitual language of your soul; if you do not thus earnestly desire to live under the manifestations of the divine love, and to be able to say, *Truly our communion is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ***, you are spiritually dead; and under the fatal influences of that *Carnal mind*, which being *enmity against God*††, engages men to live contented *Without God in the world*‡‡, so long as *Their corn and their wine increase*§§. A heart thus alienated from God, was never savingly turned to him, and can have no just reason to imagine itself the object of his paternal favour.

4. The soul "that is destitute of a sincere love to mankind," has reason to consider itself as in an unregenerate state.

You may, perhaps, think it unnecessary to mention this; but the apostle was undoubtedly a much better judge, and his own words suggest this particular to me: *Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God: He that loveth not, knoweth not God*, and consequently cannot be born of him; for God is love‖‖.

* Rom. vii. 24. † Rom. vi. 12. ‡ Rom. vii. 5. § Psal. xxx. 5.
‖ Psal. iv. 6. ¶ Gal. iv. 6. ** 1 John i. 3. †† Rom. viii. 7.
‡‡ Eph. ii. 12. §§ Psal. iv. 7. ‖‖ 1 John iv. 7, 8.

And our Lord strongly intimates the same thought, when he exhorts his disciples to the most universal and unlimited benevolence by this argument, *That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven**; plainly implying, that otherwise they could not really be born of God, or claim him for their Father. Regeneration is to form a man for intimate communion with *The general assembly and church of the first-born*†, and to prepare him for the region of complete and everlasting love; and the first fruits of it are to appear, and to be manifested here. *It is a faithful saying, that they who have believed in God, should be careful to maintain good works*‡; and unfeigned love is to be the root of them: So that if you cannot stand this trial, your religious hopes are all delusive and vain.

Let me intreat you therefore, that you would now look into your lives, and hearts. Do any of the malignant passions harbour there? Ask yourselves, "Is there any of my fellow-creatures, whom I wish to see miserable; or would make so, if it were in my power to do it by the secret act of my will, so that no mortal on earth should ever know me to be the cause of the calamity?" If it be so, and this be your settled temper, you *Hate your brethren, and are murderers*§; and therefore are the children of *the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning*: And we may thus say of you, in the very words of our Lord, who never uttered a rash censure, *You are of your father the devil*, for his passions you cherish, *and his lusts you* would *do*‖.

But reflect farther, If you wish others no harm, do you really wish them well? and that so really, and so sincerely, as to be ready to do them good; For merely to say unto them, *Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled*¶, when you have it in your power to help them, is at once to *Mock the poor*, and to *despise him that made him***. You that are conscious of a mean selfish temper, and wrap yourselves up, as it were, in your own separate interests, or in those of your own families, and can feel a concern for no others; you that devise what you may imagine shrewd and prudent things, but none that are liberal and compassionate; you whose eye does not affect your heart, when you see the distresses of your brethren, while you have this world's good, *How dwelleth the love of God in you*††? how can you imagine, you are the children of him, whom you so little resemble?

* Mat. v. 45. † Heb. xii. 23. ‡ Tit. iii. 8. § 1 John iii. 15.
‖ John viii. 44. ¶ James ii. 16. ** Prov. xvii. 5. †† 1 John iii. 17.

Nay permit me to add once more upon this head, that if all your compassion is only moved by men's temporal calamities, and works not in any degree with respect to their spiritual and eternal interests, you have reason to fear, that it is no better than an unsanctified humanity; and indeed, that you never have learnt the worth of your own souls, while you set so little value on the souls of others, even of those, to whom you profess and intend friendship. And this concluding hint is of importance to prevent a dangerous mistake, in which too many good natured sinners are ready to flatter themselves, and in which perhaps others are too ready to join in flattering them.

5. He "that does not know what it is, to struggle with indwelling sin, and heartily to resolve against indulging it in any kind or degree," is undoubtedly still in an unregenerate state.

You will observe, I do not say, "that every one who knows what it is, to feel a struggle in his own mind, when assaulted by temptations to sin, is a truly good man:" The contrary is dreadfully apparent. A principle of natural conscience often makes very strong remonstrances against sin, and sends out bitter cries when subjected to its violence; and this is so far from denominating a man a real christian, that it rather illustrates the power of sin, and aggravates its guilt. But when a man's inclinations run entirely one way, and when he gives a swing to his natural passions without any guard or restraint; when he is a stranger to any inward conflict with himself, and any victory over his own lusts, and his corrupted will; it is a certain sign, he is yet under the dominion of satan, and is even to be numbered among the tamest of his slaves. For *They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts**; have learnt to *Deny themselves*†, and to *Mortify their members upon earth*‡.

It is also of great importance to add, that there must be "a resolution to oppose sin in every kind, and in every degree:" For *he that is born of God sinneth not*§; nay, it is elsewhere said, He cannot *commit sin*‖: And though it is too visibly true in fact, and apparent from several other passages in the very epistle whence these words are taken, that this expression is to be interpreted with some limitation; yet the least that it can be imagined to signify is this, that he does not wilfully allow himself in the practice of any sin. He has learnt to *Hate every false way*, and to *esteem all God's precepts, con-*

* Gal. v. 24. † Mat. xvi. 24. ‡ Col. iii. 5. § 1 John v. 18. ‖ 1 John iii. 9.

*cerning all things, to be right**: So that upon the whole, if he *Might have his request, and God would grant him the thing that he longs for*†, it would be this, to sin no more, and to get rid of every sentiment, desire, and affection, in any degree contrary to the purity of God's nature and law. If therefore there be any of you, that spare one accursed thing, though you should seem eager on destroying all the rest; if it be the secret language of your soul, "There is but one lust, that I will indulge; there is but one temptation that I will comply with;" I perceive *Your hearts are not right in the sight of God*‡; for though you could, according to your pretended purpose, keep all the rest of the law, and yet *offend in* this *one point* alone, you would in effect be *a transgressor of all*§. In short, *He that committeth sin, is of the devil*‖; but *He that is begotten of God, keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not*¶.

6. He "that does not know what it is, to overcome this world, and to place his happiness in another," is yet in an unregenerate state.

This is another of those certain marks, which God has given us of his own children. *Whatsoever is born* of God, as it is very emphatically expressed in the original, *overcometh the world***. It is not, you see, the extraordinary attainment of a few more eminent christians; but it is an essential branch of every good man's character: For he is *Begotten again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* even *to* the hope of *an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*††. You have reason therefore to judge very uncomfortably concerning your state, if you are strangers to this lively hope; which is a very different thing from that hope to be saved, of which some people talk in so indolent, not to say, in so profane a manner, as to shew, that it is *The hope of the hypocrite,* which *will perish, when God takes away his soul*‡‡. If you are conscious to yourselves, that you *mind earthly things,* your *end* will be *destruction*§§; for having *your heart on earth,* it is plain your only *treasure is here*‖‖: And if you govern yourselves by worldly maxims alone, and your great care be to obtain those riches and honours, which the children of the world pursue; if the importance of eternity has never appeared in

* Psal. cxix. 128. † Job vi. 8. ‡ Acts viii. 21. § James ii. 10. ‖ 1 John iii. 8. ¶ 1 John v. 18. ** 1 John v. 4. πᾶν τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ. †† 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. ‡‡ Job viii. 13. xxvii. 8. §§ Phil. iii. 19. ‖‖ Mat. vi 21.

such a light, as to make you judge every thing trifling that can come in competition with it; nay, whatever your views of eternity have been, if you are not practically carrying on a scheme for it; and if you cannot, and do not, deny your worldly interest, when it cannot be secured without hazarding your eternal hopes; it is plain you are *friends of the world*, in such a sense as none can be, but he must be an *enemy of God**. If indeed you were dead to the world, and *Your life hid with Christ in God*, you would *Set your affections on things above*, on those things which are there, *where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God*†: But the want of this temper shews, that you are *carnally minded*, which it *is death* to be‡; and that the redeeming love of Christ has never exerted its influence upon your souls, nor his cross had any due efficacy upon you; for if it had, *The world* would have been *crucified to you, and you to the world*§.

7. The soul "that does not long for greater improvements in the divine life," is still a stranger to the first principles of it.

You know, that we are called, as christians, with an *High and holy calling*‖; and as he that is the author of this calling, is holy, so are we to be *Holy in all manner of conversation*¶, and to be *perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect***. Here will therefore be room for improvement, not only during our continuance in the present life, but through all the ages of a glorious eternity; and it is the ardent desire of every good man, that in this sense above all others, his *Path may* be *like the shinging light, that shineth more and more, until the perfect day*††. And this is the one thing that he does, or that in which all his labours centre; being conscious to himself how far he is from having *Already attained, or being already perfect, forgetting the things that are behind*, he *reacheth forth unto those things that are before*, and *presses toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*‡‡. In this view he seriously considers the circumstances of life in which providence has placed him; that he may observe the advantages, which these circumstances give him for religious improvements; and it is delightful to him to discover such advantages.

Now if there be any of you, who know nothing of this temper, you are certainly in an unregenerate state: For none can be born of God, that do not love him; and none can truly love him, that do not earnestly desire, more and more to resemble

* Jam. iv. 4. † Col. iii. 1, 2, 3. ‡ Rom. viii. 6.
§ Gal. vi. 14. ‖ Phil. iii. 14. 2 Tim. i. 9. ¶ 1 Pet. i. 15.
** Mat. v. 48. †† Prov. iv. 18. ‡‡ Phil. iii. 12—14.

him. So that if your hearts can indulge such a thought as this, "I wish I knew how much religion would be just sufficient to save me, and I would go so far, and stop there;" your conscience must tell you, that you secretly hate religion, and are unwillingly dragged toward the form of it, by an unnatural and external violence, the fear of misery and ruin in neglecting it; and that you are not actuated by the free and liberal principle of a nature savingly renewed.

8. The soul "that does not know what it is, to live by faith in Christ, and in dependance on his Spirit," is still in an unregenerate state.

We *Are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus**, if indeed we are so at all; and *He that is joined to the Lord*, in this sense, *is one spirit* with him†. But *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*‡; for as God has *Predestinated us to the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to himself*§, so of his fulness it is, that all believers do *Receive, even grace for grace*‖, or an abundance and variety of grace, by virtue of their union with him, who is *The head; from whom the whole body, being fitly joined together, and strengthened by what every joint supplies, by an* energy proportionable to every part, *increases to the edifying of itself in love*¶. These things, as you see, are not only hinted in scripture, but are copiously insisted upon, as very material points: And though I readily acknowledge, good men may apprehend and consider them very differently, and may express those apprehensions in different phrases; yet as experience makes it plain, that those souls generally flourish most, who have the most distinct conceptions of them, and the most habitual regard to them; so I think it is plain from these scriptures, that there can be no religion at all, where there is a total insensibility of them. If therefore there are any of you, that apprehend it is enthusiasm to talk of the assistances of the Spirit; nay, I will add, if there are any of you, that do not earnestly desire these assistances, and do not seek them daily from the hand of Christ, as the great covenant-head of his people; you are, I fear, strangers to some of *The first principles of the oracles of God***, and are *Sensual, not having the Spirit*††. And though you may now and then form a hasty, and perhaps a warm resolution in religion, you will quickly, with the proud *Youth*, that are conceited of their own sufficiency, *faint and be weary*,

* Gal. iii. 26. † 1 Cor. vi. 17. ‡ Rom. viii. 9. § Ephes. i. 5.
‖ John i. 16. ¶ Ephes. iv. 15, 16. ** Heb. v. 12. †† Jude ver. 19.

and with *the young men* you will *utterly fail;* while *they* only *that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength, shall mount up as on eagles wings,* and pressing on with an unwearied pace, according to the different degrees of vigour which the different parts of their course may require, *shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint**. In short, if you do not thirst after the water of life, that is, as the Evangelist himself explains it, the Spirit, which they that *Believe on Christ shall receive*†, however bountiful he is, he makes no promise to impart it to you; and if you never receive it, all your other sources of comfort will soon be dried up, and the miserable condition of the creature, that asked in vain for one drop of water to *cool his tormented tongue*‡, will certainly be yours.

Here I apprehend multitudes will miscarry, who have made a fair shew in the eyes of men; and if you are condemned by this mark, I am sure you will not be acquitted by any of the preceding. For all the branches of an holy temper have such a connection with this, and such a dependance upon it, that a man, who is destitute of this, can have only the semblance of the rest.

And thus, Sirs, I have with all plainness and faithfulness, as in the sight of God, and sensible of my account to him, laid before you a variety of hints, by which I think you may safely and truly judge, whether you be, or be not, in an unregenerate state: And I shall now beg leave to conclude this discourse with one plain inference from the whole, viz.

That baptism is not regeneration, in the scriptural, and most important sense of the word.

To prove this as a corollary from the preceding discourse, I shall only assume this most reasonable concession, with which you may remember I at first set out; "that regeneration, and being born of God, signify the same thing." Now I have shewn you from a variety of scriptures under the former heads, that every one whom the sacred oracles represent as *born of God*, receiveth Christ, *overcometh the world*, and sinneth not. But it is too plain, that these characters do not agree to every one that is baptized; and consequently it evidently follows, that every one who is baptized is not of course born of God, or regenerate; and therefore, that baptism is not scripture regeneration.

I think no mathematical demonstration plainer, and more certain than this conclusion; and therefore, whatever great and ancient names may be urged on the other side of the ques-

* Isa. xl. 30, 31. † John vii. 39. ‡ Luke xvi. 24.

tion, I shall rest the matter here, without leading you into the niceties of a controversy so easily decided. I would only farther observe, that they who most vigorously contend for the other manner of speaking, for after all it is but a dispute about a word, acknowledge expressly, that a man may be saved without what they call regeneration, and that he may perish with it. And though persons are taught to speak of their state, in consequence of baptism, in very high, and I fear, dangerous terms; yet when wise and good men come to explain those terms, it evidently appears, that many of whom they are used, are so in a state of salvation as to be daily obnoxious to damnation; so the children of God, as also to be the children of the devil; and so inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, as to be *children of wrath*, and on the brink of hell.

Where persons of real piety apprehend themselves under a necessity of using such phrases with respect to all that are baptized, we cannot blame them for endeavouring to bring down their signification, as low as possible: But they will, I hope, excuse those, who chuse to speak, in what they apprehend to be a more scriptural, rational, and edifying language.

It was a matter of conscience with me, to state the matter as you have heard. I do therefore earnestly intreat you, my dearly beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the sake of your own immortal souls, that you deceive not yourselves with vain words; but that where your eternal salvation is so plainly concerned, you bring the cause, the important cause, to an immediate trial: And if you are convinced, as I suppose many of you quickly may be, that you are at present *dead in trespasses and sins*, then let me beseech you, to reflect on what the most transient survey of the scripture may teach you, as to the danger of such a case. For though it will be my business, in the process of these discourses, more largely to represent it, when I come to speak of the necessity of the new birth, God only knows, whether your lives may be continued, till we advance so far in the subject: And where a case of this kind is in question, the delay of a week, or even of a day, may be inevitable and eternal ruin.

SERMON II.

ON REGENERATION.

Of the Nature of Regeneration, and particularly of the Change it produces in Men's Apprehensions.

2 Cor. v. 17.—*If any Man be in Christ, he is a new Creature; old Things are passed away, behold, all Things are become new.*

THE knowledge of our true state in religion, is at once a matter of so great importance, and so great difficulty, that in order to obtain it, it is necessary we should have *line upon line*, and *precept upon precept*. The plain discourse which you heard last Lord's day, was intended to lead you into it; and I question not, but I then said enough to convince many, that they were in an unregenerate condition. Nevertheless, as there are various approaches towards regeneration and conversion, which on the whole fall short of it; I think it very expedient now to give you, what I may properly enough call the counter-part of this view; which I shall, by divine assistance, attempt from the words I have now been reading.

The apostle who wrote them, was transported to such a zeal for Christ, and for the souls of men, that some thought him *Beside himself** ; and no doubt many would represent him, as the greatest enthusiast upon the face of the earth. But as it was *A very small thing to him to be judged of man's judgment*†, he calmly vindicates himself, by declaring that there was a cause for all this warmth, as the honour of God and the Redeemer, and the eternal salvation of men, were so intimately concerned in the affair: *The love of Christ*, says he, *constrains us*‡, or as the word§ properly signifies, *it bears us away with it*, like a mighty torrent, which we are not able to resist; *because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead*, under the sentence of God's righteous law, or they would not have needed such an atonement as the blood of his Son; and we farther judge, *That he died for all, that they who* now *live*, only in consequence of his dying love, *should not henceforth live unto*

* Ver. 13. † 1 Cor. iv. 3. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 14. § Συνεχει.

*themselves, but unto him that died for them**. We therefore live to this Jesus; we consecrate our lives and labours to this purpose, and in consequence of it, *we henceforth know no man after the flesh*, that is, we do not regard our temporal interests, nor consider how we may most effectually obtain the favour and friendship of those who may be useful to us in life; *yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh*, or have expected a temporal Messiah, who should make our nation triumphant over the Gentiles, and enrich it with the spoils of other nations, *yet now henceforth we know him no more* under such a character†. And in this respect the same temper will prevail in the heart of every real christian; and therefore, i. e. in consequence of what was said before of the Redeemer's love, *if any man be in Christ*, if he be really one of his faithful servants united to him by a lively faith, and in consequence of that union interested in his salvation, *he is a new creature;* his views and sentiments, his affections and pursuits, are so entirely changed, that he seems, as it were, to be come into a new world, and to be transformed quite into another person from what he formerly was: *Old things are passed away*, and, *behold* the astonishing transformation! *All things are become new.* This is the thought, that I am now to illustrate; and you cannot but see, how proper a foundation it will be for our discourse on the second general I proposed, which is,

Secondly, Particularly to describe the nature of that great change, which passes on every soul, that is truly regenerate, in the scriptural, and most important sense of the word‡.

And here it may hardly seem necessary to tell you, that I do not mean to assert that the substance of the soul, and its natural faculties, are in a strict and proper sense changed: A man might as reasonably assert from such a scripture, that the former body was annihilated, and a new one produced; and common sense and decency will not allow us to imagine, that the apostle meant any thing of this nature, by the general terms he uses here. But the plain meaning is, that, when a man becomes a real christian, the whole temper and character of his

* 2 Cor. v. 15. † Ver. 16.

‡ Some chuse to call the change here described, renovation, rather than regeneration. I have given my reasons before, (page 394.) why I use the words promiscuously: But I shall endeavour through the whole of these discourses, so to state the nature of this change, as to have no controversy with good men of any persuasion about any thing but the name of it; concerning which, I hope they will not contend with me, as I am sure I will not quarrel with them.

mind is so changed, as to become different from that of the generality of mankind, and different from what it formerly was, while in an unenlightened and unrenewed state. It is not merely a little circumstantial alteration; it is not assuming a new name, professing new speculative opinions, or practising some new rites and forms: But it is becoming, (as we frequently say in our usual forms of speech,) a different creature, or a new man.——And thus the sacred writers express themselves in many other passages, which very happily serve to illustrate this. They, in particular, represent God as promising, with relation to this work*; *A new heart will I give them, and a new spirit will I put within them; and I will take away the heart of stone*, the stubborn, obstinate, impenetrable disposition they once had, and will give them an heart of flesh, a tender, compliant temper, which shall incline them to submit to my will with humility, and to obey it with delight. And thus, when the apostle had exhorted the Ephesians†, to *Put off, with respect to their former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to its deceitful lusts;* he adds, *And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God*, or in conformity to his image, *is created in righteousness and true holiness:* Which is further illustrated by his important exhortation to the Romans‡, *Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.* And on the same principles, what in one place he calls the *New creature*§, in another parallel place he expresses, by *Faith that works by love*‖, and by *Keeping the commandments of God*¶; for all these, as equivalent characters, he opposes to *circumcision and uncircumcision*, or to the mere externals of a religious profession; declaring the utter insufficiency of the latter, and the absolute necessity of the former.

The general nature of this change may then be understood, by an attentive consideration of such scriptures as those mentioned above; which indeed contain what is most essential on this subject. But for the more complete illustration of the matter, I shall particularly shew you, that where there is reason to speak of a man, as one of those who are in Christ Jesus, or who are truly regenerate, there will be "New apprehensions, new affections, new resolutions, new labours, new enjoyments, and new hopes;" and perhaps there are few important branches of the christian character, which may not be introduced, as illustrating one or other of these remarks.

* Ezek. xxxvi. 26. † Ephes. iv. 22—24. ‡ Rom. xii. 2.
§ Gal. vi. 15. ‖ Gal. v. 6. ¶ 1 Cor. vii. 19.

The former of them is indeed the foundation of the rest; because as religion is a reasonable service, all the change which is made in the affections and resolutions, in the pursuits, enjoyments, and hopes of a good man, arises from that different view, in which he is now taught to look on those objects, the nature of which is to direct his choice, to determine his conduct, and regulate his passions: It will therefore be the business of this evening's discourse to shew you,

I. That wherever there is a real principle of regeneration, there will be new apprehensions of things.

When God created the natural world, he said, in the very beginning of this work, *Let there be light, and there was light**: And thus he deals in this new creation, which raises the soul from a chaos, to such a beautiful, well-ordered, and well-furnished frame. *God*, says the apostle, *who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ†;* whereas before *The understanding was darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness* or perverseness *of their hearts‡.*

Now this illumination, of which I am speaking, does not so much refer to a speculative, as to a practical and heart-impressing knowledge. It is true, that when a man once comes to be in good earnest in religion, he generally arrives at a clearer and fuller knowledge even of the doctrines of christianity, than he had before: For he then sets himself to enquire with greater diligence, and to seek light of the great Father of lights with greater earnestness; he gets clear of many evil affections, that put a corrupt bias upon his judgment; and he comes within the reach of those promises, *Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord§;* and *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God‖.* Yet I think, I may very properly say, that at various times, when our judgment of any object is the same, our apprehensions of it are very different. It is one thing, for instance, to believe that God is the omnipotent, all-wise, and all-gracious Governor of the World; and another, and very different thing, to have the heart powerfully impressed with an apprehension of his ability and readi-

* Gen. i. 3. † 2 Cor. iv. 6. ‡ Ephes. iv. 18.
§ Hos. vi. 3. ‖ John vii. 17.

ness to help us. I will therefore a little more particularly illustrate those respects, in which the apprehensions of such as are really regenerate, differ from those which they formerly had: And I hope you will do yourselves the justice to reflect, as we go along, how far you have ever felt these apprehensions which you hear me describe; and I have a pleasing persuasion, that many of you have felt them, in a much livelier manner than they can be described. I would observe then to you, that a regenerate soul has new apprehensions of God—of itself,—of Christ,—of eternity,—and of the way and method that God has marked out for its being happy there."

1. A regenerate soul has new apprehensions "of the blessed God."

There are very few, who pretend so much as to doubt of the being of a God; and fewer yet, that will venture to deny it: and even among those, who have denied it, and disputed against it, some, by their own confession, have felt their hearts give them the lie, and upbraid them for using the powers of reason and speech, against the giver and preserver of both. I persuade myself at least, there are none that hear me this day, who would not look upon a professed atheist as a monster, unworthy to be a member of human society, and little to be trusted in any of its relations. Yet after all, while the being of the blessed God is warmly asserted, his nature is so little understood and considered, that there are thousands who may still properly be said, to be *Without God in the world**, or in practice and temper, though not in notion, to be atheists in it. Wicked men therefore in general are described, as those *That know not God*†: But where God has determined to glorify his mercy in the salvation of a sinner, he *Shines into the heart* for this blessed purpose, *to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God*‡. And thus the glories of the Divine Being are known to the regenerate soul in such a manner, as they are not to the most acute metaphysician, or the sublimest philosopher, who is himself a stranger to the spiritual life.

The person of whom we now speak, has new apprehensions "of the spirituality and omnipresence of God,—of his majesty and purity,—of his power and patience,—of his goodness,—and his intimate access to men's spirits, with the reality and importance of his operations upon them."—Permit me a little to represent the views of each, both to direct your

* Eph. ii. 12. † 2 Thess. i. 8. ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

enquiries, and also to impress your minds, and my own, with truths in which we have all so intimate a concern.

The divine spirituality and omnipresence is apprehended by the good man in a peculiar manner. That there is some immaterial substance, and that matter is moved by his active power continually impressed upon it, according to stated laws, is indeed so plain a dictate of reason, that I question not, but the thought influences the minds of some, who have not so much acquaintance with language, as to be able properly to express it: But alas, it easily passes through, as if no way important. It is quite a different thing, to feel, as it were, the presence of an infinitely intelligent, and all-observing Deity, actually surrounding us in all times and places;——to say from the heart, *Oh Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me,* so that *thou understandest my thoughts afar off: Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me**;—to feel, as it were, the hand of God, which indeed we may feel, if we duly attend to it, in all the impressions made on our bodily senses, and on the powers of our mind;—to feel ourselves even now supported by it, and to argue from the constant support of his hand, the never-failing notice of his eye. "He reads my present thoughts; he knows, even now, all the secrets of my soul, and has always known them; has always observed my conduct in every the minutest particular, and recorded, in permanent characters, the whole history of my life, and of my heart; of this depraved sinful life, of this vain, this treacherous, this rebellious heart."

With this conception of the divine observance are closely and intimately connected new apprehensions of the purity of God, and of his infinite majesty; views, which mutually assist, and illustrate each other. The irreverence with which the generality of men behave in the presence of God; and the easiness with which they admit the slightest temptation to sin against him, plainly shew what low notions they have of him: But God does, as it were, appear to the eye of a renewed mind, arrayed in his robes of light and majesty; so that he is ready to cry out, "*I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee*†: I see the eternal, self-existent, self-sufficient God, who *sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers;* who *spreadeth out the heavens as a tent to dwell in,* and *looks down on the nations as the drop of a bucket, and counts them as the small dust of the*

* Psal. cxxxix. 1—7. † Job xlii. 5.

balance : Who would not fear before him? who would not tremble at his presence† ?* who would not revere that God, *who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity‡ ; who cannot be tempted with evil§*, but must see it, and hate it, even in all its forms ?"

And such too are the views it has of his almighty power, that the enlightened mind will further add, " A God of almighty power, who could speak a whole world into ruin; undoubtedly he could, for he spoke it into existence ; who by one single thought, by one silent volition, could easily abase the proudest creature in the universe ; must have it in his power to bring me in a moment *To the dust of death*, and to the flames of hell ; to lay me as low in misery, and to hold me as long in it as he should please : This, O my soul, this is the God, against whom such feeble worms as we are daily offending, and whom we madly presume to make our enemy."

This gives the regenerate man a further sense of the patience of God, than ever he had before. Others may look round upon the world, and wonder there is so much penal evil in it; but the renewed soul wonders, there is not a thousand times more. When he sees, how *The world lieth in wickedness‖* ; when he observes, how poor impotent mortals are, many of them perhaps, in words blaspheming the God of heaven ; many more of them, most presumptuously violating all the plainest and most important precepts of his law ; and most of the rest, living in a perpetual forgetfulness of him, as if he were not at all, or were not so considerable as to be any way worth their notice ; such an one cannot but wonder, that the Almighty Majesty of heaven does not in a moment make himself known by *The thunder of his power*, and confound all their madness and folly, by crushing the world with its inhabitants into ruin. He often sees the rising sun, and the descending rain, with astonishment that it should be sent down on such a world as ours.

He has also more affecting views than ever of the divine goodness. Most men speculatively believe it ; and they take occasion, even from that belief, to affront it : But a good man views it at once as a delightful, and a venerable thing : He *Fears the Lord and his* goodness¶ ; and while it encourages him, guilty as he is, to repose himself upon it as his hope, it awakens a generous kind of confusion at the thought of ever having offended him, and fills his very soul with indignation at the thought of repeating such offences.

* Isa. xl. 15, 22. † Jer. v. 22. ‡ Hab. i. 13. § Jam. i. 13.
‖ 1 John v. 19. ¶ Hos. iii. 5.

And once more, The regenerate man has quite different notions than before, of the intimate access which God has to the spirits of men, and his important power of operating upon them. The greatest part of men indeed consider not, as they ought, how the whole material world perpetually depends upon a divine agency, and is no other than one grand machine, on which the great artificer continually acts, to make it an instrument of mercy to his sensitive and intelligent creatures. But there are yet fewer, who seriously consider, how entirely *The hearts of men are in the hands of the Lord*, and how much depends on his influences upon them. Nevertheless experience teaches the renewed soul, that he is *The God of the spirits of all flesh**, and that he not only views, but manages them as he pleases. "Lord," does he say, "this spirit of mine is shaded with thick darkness, but thou canst illuminate it; it is diseased, but thou canst cure it; it is *Unstable as water*†, and lighter than a feather, yet thou canst fix and establish it; and whatever thou wouldest have me to be, and to do, for thy glory, and mine own happiness, thou canst *Work in me both to will and to perform it*‡: So that all I need, to the rectitude and felicity of my nature, is only this, that I may have more of thine inward, vital, operative presence." It is not easy to conceive, what efficacy this thought has, for the transformation of the soul. But again,

2. New apprehensions are connected with these sentiments in the regenerate soul, "concerning itself, and its own state."

It is surprising to think, how many run through successive years in life, without ever turning the eye of the mind inward, that the soul may survey itself. I speak not of a philosophical survey of the faculties of the mind; which, though indeed in its place it be useful and entertaining, is no more necessary in its refinements to a well-ordered state, than skill in anatomy is to a healthful constitution: But I speak of those views of the mind, which are in the reach of all, how low soever their genius, or their education may have been.

As all true happiness is an internal thing, wherever God intends to produce it in the heart of a revolted corrupted creature, and such alas, we all naturally are, he leads it into a view of itself; and shews it, if I may be allowed the expression, a mixture of grandeur and misery, that lies within; which yet the greatest part of mankind live and die without ever observing. "I am here," does the awakened creature say, "an

* Numb. xxvii. 16. † Gen. xlix. 4. ‡ Phil. ii. 13.

intelligent being; far superior to this well-wrought frame of flesh and blood, which God has given me for a little while to command, and which I must quickly drop in the dust: I am made capable of determining my own choice, of directing my own actions, of judging concerning the importance of ends, and the propriety of means in subserviency to them: And while I see a vast variety of creatures in different forms beneath me, I see no rank of creatures above me, nothing nobler than man, here on earth where I dwell. Yet I see man, in the midst of his glory, a feeble dependant mortal creature, who cannot possibly be his own end, nor can of himself alone, by any means command or insure his own happiness.——Every thing tells me, that he is the creature of God; and that it is his greatest honour and felicity, to know, and practically to acknowledge himself to be so: Every thing tells me, that it is most reasonable, that God, who is the great original of man, should also be the end of his being: But have I made him the end of mine? My soul, thou art conscious to thyself, thou hast lived in many instances *Without him in the world**.——He has given thee, even in the system of thine own nature, and of the visible beings that are round about thee, compared with his providential interposition in the management of them, the imitations of his holy and righteous will: He has expressed these dictates far more plainly in his written word: And when thou comest to examine them, how art thou condemned by them? When thou comest to think of the spirituality and purity of his being, and his law, how shameful does thy temper, and thy life, appear to have been? what an infinite disproportion is there between that, and its perfect rule!——And whom, oh my soul, hast thou offended? whose law hast thou broken? whose grace hast thou despised? The law, the grace of that eternal God, of whom I have now been hearing; who is here present with me, who is even within me, and who sees, oh my heart, more distinctly than thou canst see, all thy guilt, and all its aggravations. Oh Lord, *I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*†. I have talked of sin, and of the sentence of God against it, as a thing of course: But oh my soul, it is thine own concern! Thy guilt, the stain of sin is still upon thee; the sentence of God is pronounced against thee; and it must be reversed, or thou art undone for ever. These irregular habits and dispositions that prevail in thee, must be corrected, or they will prove thy mortal disease, and everlasting torment.—Thou art a poor weak irreso-

* Eph. ii. 12. † Job xlii. 6.

lute creature: The experience of every past day of life, since I began to think of religion at all, proves it: Yet thou must, by some means or other, attain to inward strength and inward purity, or thou art lost; and all these great capacities, and glorious faculties, will but make thy ruin so much the more distinguished. Oh how weighty the care! oh how great the charge! What shall I do, that thought, that reason, that immortality, may not be my destruction? Where shall I find a rock, that will be firm enough for my support and safety? where shall I find the means to build the fabric of such a happiness, as thine, oh my soul, must be, if ever I am happy at all?"

Thus does God teach the mind, by its inward reviews and reflections, this important lesson of its own impotence and guilt, of its depravity and ruin; and so prepares it for those new apprehensions of Christ, which I mentioned as the third particular.

3. The regenerate soul has new apprehensions "concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, considered as a Mediator in general, and as such a particular Mediator as he is exhibited in the word of God."

That affecting view, which the regenerate soul has, of the majesty, glory, power, and purity, of the blessed God, will undoubtedly convince him, how unfit he is in himself to appear before his awful presence. He is ready to sink down in the dust at the very thought, and to say, *Who is able to stand before such a* great and *holy God,* as thou art*? If I were in all the original rectitude and glory of my nature, I could not do it: How much less surrounded as I am, with so much guilt, with so much pollution! I need, as it were, *A days-man betwixt us, who might lay his hand upon us both*†, who should transact affairs in my name with God, and bring the peaceful messages of God to me: Let such an one speak with me, and I will hear; but let not God speak with me, lest I die‡."

And when he comes to take a more near and intimate view of this Mediator which God has exhibited in the gospel, the renewed soul is even charmed and transported with the view: And that Jesus, whose name he before pronounced with so much coldness, that the very mention of it was a kind of profanation, now is regarded by him as *The chiefest among ten thousand*§. He *Beholds his glory, as that of the only begotten*

* 1 Sam. vi. 20. † Job ix. 33. ‡ Exod. xx. 19. § Cant. v. 10.

*of the Father, full of grace and truth**. The union of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ, though it appears indeed a mystery, which he cannot fully explain, is nevertheless a glorious certainty, which in the general he most cordially believes. He sees *Emmanuel God* dwelling *with us* in human flesh, and acquiesces in the sight; while the rays of divine glory are attempered by passing *Through the vail, that is to say, his flesh*†. He considers Christ, as *Made of God* unto him *wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*‡: And each of these views rejoices him to the very heart. "Ignorant as I am, I shall be taught and instructed by him, that great Prophet whom God sent into the world; by him, who is incarnate wisdom, as well as incarnate love; whose words resound in the gospel, and whose spirit seals the instructions of his word. Guilty as I am, my crimes shall be expiated; for there is *Redemption in his blood*, even *the forgiveness of sins*§: There is an everlasting righteousness, that he has introduced; and oh, how richly will it adorn my soul! ——This pollution of mine shall not for ever exclude me from a comfortable intercourse with the pure Majesty of heaven; for Christ is come to be my sanctification; and he can cleanse me by his Spirit, and transform me into that divine delightful image which I have lost.——Victorious Lord, how easily canst thou redeem me from that state of servitude, in which I have been kept so long complaining! how easily, and how powerfully, canst thou vindicate me *Into the glorious liberty of the children of God*‖!—Blessed Jesus, thou art my light, and my strength, my hope, and my joy! Thou art just such a Saviour, as my necessity requires; thou fillest up all my wants, and all my wishes; thou art all in all to me! I would not be ignorant of thee for ten thousand worlds; I would not live a day, nor an hour, without recollecting, who, and what thou art, and maintaining that intercourse with thee, which is the life of my soul."

4. The regenerate soul has also new apprehensions "of the importance of eternity, when compared with time and all its concerns."

It is indeed a most pitiable thing, and awakens our astonishment, grief, and indignation, to observe how the things of this world press down immortal spirits, and reduce them almost

* John i. 14. † Heb. x. 20. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 30.
§ Eph. i. 7. ‖ Rom. viii. 21.

indeed to a state of brutality. Most deplorable it is, to see the power and energy of those motives, which are taken merely from this earth, and its little concernments; so that if a man did but know what was the favourite vanity, he might almost predict, from the knowledge of circumstances, how a man's actions would be ordered; and might almost be sure, that he would follow, whithersoever this interest, or that pleasure, this ambitious, or that mercenary view called him; though all the prospects for an eternal world pleaded the contrary way. Such is the folly and *Madness* that *is in men's hearts while they live; and after that, they go* down *to the dead**, and spend that immortal duration, which they have despised, in fruitless lamentations. Fatal delusion! which it is the great design of the gospel to cure.

But when a soul becomes *wise to salvation*, it is taught to *Look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen;* because it has now a full sense of what before it only notionally confessed, that *the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal*†.—— Eternity! it is impossible I should tell you, how much an eye that is enlightened by God, sees, and reads, as it were in that one word; while one scene beyond another is still opening on the mind, till its sight, and its thoughts are swallowed up: And as the creatures are as nothing with respect to God, so all the interests of time, with respect to eternity, appear as *Less than nothing, and vanity*‡. To be made for an everlasting existence appears in so awful a view, that while it has some pleasing hope, it rejoices with trembling; and every remaining fear, with relation to this great interest, seems a greater evil, than the certainty of any temporal calamity.

I might add upon this head, that the regenerate soul has not only new views of the importance, but likewise of the nature of the invisible and eternal state; and particularly of the nature of the celestial happiness. It does not consider it merely, or chiefly, as a state of corporeal enjoyment, formed to gratify and delight the senses; but as a state of perfect conformity to God, and most endearing intercourse with him; of which as it begins already by divine grace to taste the pleasures, so it most ardently thirsts after them; and would be heartily willing to lose this body for ever, and to bid an eternal adieu to every object capable of giving it delight; rather than it would consent to lose,

* Eccles. ix. 3. † 2 Cor. iv. 18. ‡ Isa. xl. 17.

in a perpetual succession of such objects, the sight of the Father of Spirits, and that sensibility of his love, which adds the most substantial solidity, and exalted relish to every inferior good, that can be desired from it.

5. A regenerate man has also new apprehensions "of the way which God has marked out to this happiness."

Nothing is more common, than for carnal and ignorant men to imagine, that it is a very easy thing to get to heaven; and upon this presumption, they *Hew out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water*;* and often live and die with a *Lye in* their *right hand*†. But the renewed soul, having such awful notions of the blessed God, and such apprehensions of the excellency and glory of the heavenly state, as you have heard, deeply feels how absolutely necessary it is, that something of a very great and important change should pass in the mind of that sinful creature, that ever hopes to be a partaker of it. He sees, that it is impossible, any external profession, or external rite, should secure so great an end; impossible, that baptism should be regeneration, in that sense in which the scripture uses the word, or that by this alone, though ever so regularly administered, a man's eternal happiness should be secured. He sees, that to be associated to this or that party of christians, to join with established, or with separate churches, and to be ever so zealous for their respective order, worship, and discipline, is a thing quite of foreign consideration here; and that the best, or the worst of men, may be, and probably are, on one side, and on another; nay, that ignorance, pride, and bigotry may take occasion from hence, to render men farther from the kingdom of God, than any mistake in judgment, or practice, on these disputed points, could have set them.

No, my brethren, when a man's eyes are enlightened by God's renewing Spirit, he sees and feels, that in the language of scripture, he must be *Created* anew *in Christ Jesus*‡: He sees, that *Holiness* is a character *without which no man shall see the Lord*§; and he is perhaps little anxious, whether this, or the faith that produces it, shall be called a condition, or a qualification, or an instrument, while he sees he must perish without it: He sees, that as it is absolutely necessary, so it is very extensive, as the *Commandment* which is its rule is *exceeding broad*‖: He sees, that it must not only effectually regulate the actions of his life, but controul all the sentiments of his heart: Nay, he sees,

* Jer. ii. 13. † Isa. xliv. 20. ‡ Eph. ii. 10. § Heb. xii. 14. ‖ Psal. cxix. 96.

it must not only be submitted to as a necessary, but be chosen as a most amiable thing: And accordingly, he does chuse it as such.——The unregenerate soul, when he hears of repentance and reformation, though he understands not half that it means, nor is aware of what will in fact be the greatest difficulty of it, looks upon it at best as a nauseous medicine, which he must take, or die: But the regenerate man finds his heart so wonderfully and so happily changed, that he regards it for itself, as the food, the health, and the life of his soul; as that which necessarily brings its own pleasures, and in a considerable degree its own reward along with it; so that now, as David beautifully expresses it, *He openeth his mouth, and panteth; because he longs for God's commandments**.

And I will add once more, The good man is also made sensible of the place which faith and holiness hold, in the scheme which God has laid, for our justification before him, and our acceptance with him. I do not say, that all christians conceive of this with equal perspicuity, or express their conceptions with equal exactness: The most candid allowance should here be made for the different ideas they fix to the same phrases, as they have been used to look upon them with veneration, or with suspicion. But this I will venture to say, because I am persuaded the scripture will bear me out in it, "that the confidence of a regenerate soul is not fixed on his own holiness, or faith, as the meritorious cause of his acceptance with God." He is deeply and cordially sensible, that he is made *Accepted in the beloved*†; and seeing nothing but guilt, and weakness, and ruin in himself, he ascribes to the blessed Jesus, and to the riches of God's free grace in him, his righteousness, his strength, and his salvation. And where a man is thus persuaded, I think he must in effect believe, even though he might scruple in words expressly to own it, "that Christ, as our great surety, having perfectly obeyed the law of God himself, and by his blood having fully satisfied the divine justice for the breach of it, we, on our believing in him by a vital faith, are justified before God by the imputation of his perfect righteousness." This latter way of stating it, when rightly explained, appears just equivalent to the former; and it is a manner of conceiving and expressing it, which, when rightly understood, seems extremely suitable to that deep humility, and poverty of spirit, to which the renewed soul is brought, when, like a *New-born babe, it desires the sincere milk of the word, that it may grow thereby*‡. But as

* Ver. 131. † Eph. i. 6. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 2.

the mind, at such a time, finds little inclination to contend about words and phrases, it would be much less proper for me, to enter into any controversy about them here.

Let it suffice for the present, that I have given you this plain representation of that change, which is wrought in a man's apprehensions, when he is made a new creature. When *Old things are passed away*, he has new apprehensions of God, of himself, of Christ, of eternity, and of the way to obtain the happiness of it: And as at this happy time *all things are become new*, there are "New affections, new resolutions, new labours, new enjoyments, and new hopes," which are the result of the change already described. But it will be much more difficult to reduce what I have to offer on these heads, within the bounds of the next discourse, than proper to attempt any of them in this. Go home, my friends, and try yourselves by what you have already heard; and be assured, that if you are condemned by this part of the description, it is impossible you should be approved by any that will follow; since they have all their foundation in this.

SERMON III.

ON REGENERATION.

Of the Nature of Regeneration, with Respect to the Change it produces in Men's Affections, Resolutions, Labours, Enjoyments and Hopes.

2 Cor. v. 17.——*If any Man be in Christ, he is a New Creature: Old Things are passed away, behold, all Things are become New.*

AMONG the various subjects, which exercise the thoughts and tongues of men, few are more talked of than religion. But it is melancholy to think, how little it is understood; and how much it is mistaken, and misrepresented in the world. The text before us gives us a very instructive view of it, such a view, that I am sure, an experimental knowledge of its sense would be infinitely preferable to the most critical and exact knowledge of all the most curious passages, both of the Old Testament and the New. From it, you know, I have begun to describe that great change, which the word of God teaches us to represent under the notion of regeneration, or according to the language of St. Paul, in this passage of his writings, by a new creation. I know I am explaining it before many, who have been much longer acquainted with it than myself; and it becomes me to believe, before many, that have attained to much higher advances in it: But I fear also at the same time, I speak of it before many, who are yet strangers to it; and I am labouring, by the plainest addresses that I can, to give them at least some just ideas of it. Oh that to all the descriptions, that either have, or shall be given, God may by his grace add that understanding, which arises from feeling correspondent impressions on the mind!

I have already endeavoured to illustrate those new apprehensions, which arise in the regenerate mind; apprehensions of the blessed God, of itself, of Christ, of the eternal world, and of the way to obtain the happiness of it. It now remains, that I consider those "New affections, resolutions, labours, enjoyments, and hopes," which result from them. I observe therefore,

II. That these new apprehensions will be attended with new affections.

I readily acknowledge, that the degree, in which the affections operate, may, and will be different, in different persons, according to their natural constitution: But as in some degree or another, they make an essential part of our frame, it is impossible but they must be impressed with a matter of such infinite importance, as religion will appear. And the apprehensions described above, must awaken the exercise of correspondent affections, and direct them to objects very different from those, by which they were before excited, and on which they were fixed. And here now,

1. This may be especially illustrated in love.

Love is indeed the ruling passion of the mind, and has all the rest in an avowed and real subjection to it. And here lies the very root of human misery, in our fallen and degenerate state: We are naturally lovers of ourselves in a very irregular degree; *Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God**. But on the contrary, *The first and great commandment of the law* is written in the breast of every regenerate man: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*†. It is true indeed, that if his soul were perfectly delivered into this mould, and his attainments in divine love were complete, there would be an end of all sin, and almost of all calamity too: For what evil could assail or impress a mind, entirely and unchangeably fixed upon God? Yet that the love of God should be the prevailing affection, is not merely a circumstance, but an essential part of true religion. While the good man *Sees him who is invisible*‡, as infinitely perfect in himself, and as the author of being and happiness to the whole creation, he cannot but acknowledge, that he is beyond comparison the most amiable of all objects. And though it is certain, that nothing can so much induce and inflame our love to God, as a well-grounded assurance, that he is become our God, and our Father in Christ; yet before the regenerate soul has attained to this, a sense of those favours which he receives from God in common with the whole human race, and more especially of those, which are inseparable from a christian profession, together with the apprehension of his being accessible through a Mediator, and reconcileable to sinful men, will diffuse some delightful sense of God over the mind,

* 2 Tim. iii. 4. † Mat. xxii. 37, 38. ‡ Heb. xi. 27.

which will grow sweeter in proportion to the degree, in which his own hopes brighten and settle, while they are growing toward the *full assurance of faith.*

And as the real christian *Loves him that begat, he loves him also that is begotten of him**. He *Loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity*†, viewing him not in a cold and insensible manner, as he once did, but with inflamed affections, as *The chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely*‡. If he knows in any degree *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*§, in becoming incarnate for the salvation of his people, in making himself a sacrifice for their sins, and paying his life for the ransom of their lives; he feels himself drawn toward Jesus, thus *Lifted up on the cross*‖; and *The love of Christ constrains him*¶ to such a degree, that he longs to find out some acceptable method to express his inward and over-bearing sense of it. How divided soever true christians may be in other respects, they all agree in this, in *Loving* that Jesus *whom they have not seen***.

We may further recollect on this head, that the apostle in a solemn manner adjures christians by *The love of the Spirit*††; thereby plainly implying, that such a love to him is an important branch of their character: And it must be so in all those, who regard him, as every regenerate soul does, as the author of divine light and life, and as the source of love and happiness, by whom this *Love of God is shed abroad in the heart*‡‡, while it is enlarged with sacred delight to *Run the way of his commandments*§§; as that *Spirit* by whom we *are sealed to the day of redemption*‖‖, and who brings down the foretastes of heaven to the heart in which he dwells, and which by his presence he consecrates as *The temple of God*¶¶.

And most natural is it, that a soul filled with these impressions and views, should overflow with unutterable joy, and feeling itself thus happy in an intercourse with its God, should be enlarged in love to man: For, says the apostle, *Ye are taught of God to love one another****. Those, whom he apprehends as his brethren by regenerating grace, he knows are with him beloved of the Lord; and as he hopes to dwell with them for ever in glory, he must love them, so far as he knows them, now. And though a narrow education, and that bigotry, which some-

* 1 John v. 1. † Eph. vi. 24. ‡ Cant. v. 10, 16. § 2 Cor. viii. 9.
‖ John xii. 32. ¶ 2 Cor. v. 14. ** 1 Pet. i. 8. †† Rom. xv. 30.
‡‡ Rom. v. 5. §§ Psal. cxix. 32. ‖‖ Eph. iv. 30. ¶¶ 1 Cor. iii. 16
*** 1 Thes. iv. 9.

times conceals itself under very honourable and pious names, may perhaps influence even a sanctified heart, so far as to entertain unkind suspicions as to those whose religious sentiments may differ from his own, and it may be, to pass some rash censures upon them; yet as his acquaintance with them increases, and he discerns, under their different forms, the traces of their common Father, his prejudices wear off, and that sometimes by very sensible degrees; and christians *Receive one another, as Christ has received* them all*. And where the good man cannot love others with a love of complacency and esteem, he at least beholds them with a love of compassion and pity; and remembers the relation of fellow-creatures, where he sees no reason to hope that they are fellow-heirs with him. In a word, the heart is melted down into tenderness; it is warmed with generous sentiments; it longs for opportunities of diffusing good of all kinds, both temporal and spiritual, wide as its influence can reach; it beats with an ardour, which sometimes painfully recoils upon a man's self, for want of ability to help others in proportion to his desire to do it: And that God, who knows all the inmost workings of his mind, hears many an importunate intercession for others in the hours of solemn devotion, and many a compassionate ejaculation, which he is occasionally sending up to heaven from time to time, as he passes through so sinful and so calamitous a world.

These are the ruling affections in the heart of a good man; and though it is neither reasonable, nor possible, that he should entirely divest himself of self-love, yet he endeavours to regulate it so, that it may not interfere with the more important consideration of general good. Self has the lowest place in his regards, nor does he limit his affection to a party; but aiming at extensive usefulness, he guards against those immoderate attachments to particular friendships, and those extravagant sallies of personal fondness, which are often no more than self-love under a specious disguise; which at once alienate the heart from God, and contract the social affections within very narrow, and those very irregular bounds; and so prove almost as fatal to the health of the mind, as an excessive flow of blood into one part, would be to that of the body.

I have enlarged so copiously on this change in the leading affection of the mind, that I must touch in a more transient manner on the rest. I add therefore,

* Rom. xv. 7.

2. That a regenerate soul has new aversions.

He once *Hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord**. He *Hated the light*†, which disclosed to the aching eye of his conscience the beloved and indulged irregularities of his heart. He hated every thing, that laid an embargo upon his lusts; and was ready to count those for his enemies, that plainly admonished him; and secretly to dislike those, whose conduct even silently reproved him. But now all these things are amiable to him; and those are esteemed his most valuable friends, whose examples may be most edifying, whose instructions may be most useful, and whose admonitions may be most faithful. For he now *Hates every false way*‡; yea, and every *Vain thought* too§. He looks upon every irregular desire, as an enemy, which he longs utterly to subdue; and especially strives against that *sin which does most easily beset him*, and abhors it more than he ever delighted in it. And though he rather pities, than hates the persons of the most wretched and mischievous transgressors, yet he can no longer continue an endearing friendship with those, who were once his seducers to sin, and his companions in it. In this sense, like David, he *Hates the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked*‖; and if they will not be wrought upon by his compassionate endeavours to reclaim them, he will soon break off the infectious intercourse, and say, *Depart from me, ye evil doers; for* I determine that *I will keep the commandments of my God*¶.

3. The regenerate man has also new desires.

There was a time, when sinful passions, as the apostle expresses it; *Did work in his members to bring forth fruit unto death***, He was *Fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind*††, and *Making provision to fulfil the lusts* of both‡‡. But now he earnestly desires a conformity to God, as his highest happiness; and can look up to him, and say, "Oh Lord, *The desire of my soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee*§§; to maintain such a sense of thy presence at all times, as may influence my heart to think, my lips to speak, and my hands to act, in a manner suitable to that remembrance, and agreeable to thy wise and holy will." He now *Hungers and thirsts after righteousness*‖‖; feels as real an appetite after more

* Prov. i. 29. † John iii. 20. ‡ Psal. cxix. 104. § Ver. 113.
‖ Psal. xxvi. 5. ¶ Psal. cxix. 115. ** Rom. vii. 5. †† Eph. ii. 3.
‡‡ Rom. xiii. 14. §§ Isa. xxvi. 8. ‖‖ Mat. v. 6.

advanced degrees of piety and holiness, as he ever felt toward the gratification of his senses; and *Esteems* the proper methods of attaining these advanced degrees, even *more than his necessary food**. Instead of desiring to run through a long course of animal enjoyments, he desires to get above them; longs to be a pure and triumphant spirit in the refined regions of immortality; and is *Willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord*†.

But I wave the further illustration of this, till I come to consider the new hopes which inspire him. I therefore add, as a necessary consequence of these new desires,

4. That the regenerate man has new fears.

Pain and sorrow, disappointment and affliction, he naturally feared: and the forebodings of his own mind would sometimes awaken the fears of future punishment, according to the righteous judgment of an offended God: But now he fears not merely punishment, but guilt; fears the remonstrance of an injured conscience; for he reverences conscience as God's vicegerent in his bosom. He therefore fears the most secret sins, as well as those which might occasion public disgrace; yea, he fears, lest by a precipitate and inconsiderate conduct, he should contract guilt before he is aware. He fears lest he should inadvertently injure and grieve others, even the weakest and the meanest. He fears using his liberty, in a manner that might insnare his brethren, or might occasion any scandal to a christian profession: For such is the sensibility of his heart in this respect, that he would be more deeply concerned for the dishonour brought to God, and the reproach which might be thrown on religion by any unsuitable conduct of his; than merely for that part of the shame, that might immediately and directly fall upon himself. But again,

5. The regenerate man has new joys.

These arise chiefly, from an intercourse with God through Jesus Christ, and from a review of himself, as under the sanctifying influences of his grace, and as brought into a state of favour with him, in proportion to the degree in which he can discern himself in this character and state.

You know David, speaking of God, calls him his *exceeding joy*‡; and declares the *Gladness he had put into his heart*, by *lifting up the light of his countenance upon him*, to be far beyond

* Job xxiii. 12. † 2 Cor. v. 8. ‡ Psal. xliii. 4.

what they could have, whose *corn and wine increased**. And the apostle Paul speaks of christians, as *Joying in God through Jesus Christ*†, and as *Rejoicing in Christ Jesus*‡: And Peter also describes them, as those, who *Believing in him, though unseen, rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory*§.

Perhaps there was a time, when the good man censured all pretences of this kind, now at least in these latter days of christianity, as an empty enthusiastic pretence: But since he has *Tasted that the Lord is gracious*‖, he has that experimental knowledge of their reality and excellence, which he can confidently oppose to all the most artful and sophistical cavils; and could as soon doubt, whether the sun enlightens his eyes, and warms his body, as he could question, whether God has ways of manifesting himself to souls, when it is felt with unutterable delight: And when thus entertained, he can adopt David's words, and say, that his *Soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness*, so that *with joyful lips he praises God* ¶, when his *Meditation of him is* thus *sweet***, and God says unto his soul, *I am thy salvation*††.

The survey of the Lord Jesus Christ gives him also unutterable joy; while he reflects on that ample provision, which God has made by him, for the supply of all his necessities; and that firm security, which is given to his soul, by a believing union with Christ; whereby his life is connected with that of his Saviour. In his constant presence, in his faithful care, he can *Boast all the day long*‡‡; and that friendship, which establishes a community of interests between him and his Lord, engages him to rejoice in that salvation and happiness, to which he is advanced at the right hand of God, and gives him, by joyful sympathy, his part with Christ in glory, before he personally arrives at the full possession of it.

I add, that he also rejoices in the consciousness of God's gracious work upon his own soul, so far as he can discern the traces of it there. He delights to feel himself, as it were, cured of the mortal disease, with which he once saw himself infected; to find himself in health and vigour of mind, renewed to a conformity with the divine image. He delights to look inward, and see that transformation of soul, which has made the *Wilderness like the garden of the Lord*§§, so that *Instead of the thorn there shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the briar the*

* Psal. iv. 6, 7. † Rom. v. 11. ‡ Phil. iii. 3. § 1 Pet. i. 8.
‖ 1 Pet. ii. 3. ¶ Psal. lxiii. 5. ** Psal. civ. 34. †† Psal. xxxv. 3.
‡‡ Psal. xliv. 8. §§ Isa. li. 3.

*myrtle**. Thus the good man is *Satisfied from himself*†; and though he humbly refers the ultimate glory of all to that God, by whose *Grace he is what he is*‡, he enters with pleasure into his own mind, and reckons it a part of gratitude to his great benefactor, to enjoy with as high a relish as he can, the present workings of divine grace within him, as well as the pleasing prospect of what it will farther do.

But this head has so near a resemblance to some that are to follow, that were I to enlarge upon it, as I easily might, I should leave room for nothing different to be said upon them. I will only add,

6. That, as the counter-part of this, new sorrows will arise in the mind of a regenerate man.

These are particularly such, as spring—from the withdrawings of God's presence,—from the remainder of sin in the soul,—and from the prevalence of it in the world about him.

The regenerate man will mourn, "when the reviving manifestations of God's presence are withdrawn from his soul." It seems very absurd to interpret the numberless passages in the sacred writers, in which they complain of the hidings of God's face from them, as if they merely referred to the want of temporal enjoyments, or to the pressure of temporal calamities. If the light of God's countenance, which they so expressly oppose to temporal blessings, signify a spiritual enjoyment, the want of it must relate to spiritual desertion. And I believe, there are few christians in the world, who are entirely unacquainted with this. They have most of them their seasons, when they *Walk in darkness*, and see little or *no light*§: And this, not only when anxious fears arise with relation to their own spiritual state; but at some other times, when though they can in the main call God their Father, yet he seems as it were, to stand afar off; and to continue them at a distance, which wears the face of unkindness; especially under temptations, and other afflictions, in which they lose their lively sense of God's presence, and that endearing freedom of converse with him, which, through the influence of the Spirit of adoption on their souls, they have sometimes known. If this be mysterious and unintelligible to some of you, I am heartily sorry for it: But I do not remember, that I was ever intimately acquainted with any one, who seemed to me a real christian, that has not, upon mentioning the case, acknowledged that he has felt something of it: At least I will boldly venture

* Isa. lv. 13. † Prov. xiv. 14. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 10. § Isa. l. 10.

to say this, that if you are truly regenerate, and do not know what I mean by it, it is because you have hitherto been kept in a continual flow of holy joy, or at least in a calm and cheerful persuasion of your interest in the divine favour: And even such may see the day, when *Strong* as their *mountain* seems to *stand*, God may *hide his face to their trouble**: Or however, they will infer from what they now feel, that it must be a mournful case whenever it occurs; and that sorrow in such a circumstance will soon strike on a truly sanctified heart, and wound it very deep.

The sorrow of a good man, also arises "from the remainder of sin in his soul." Though he is *Upright before God*, and proves it by *keeping himself from his iniquity*†; yet he cries out, *Who can understand his errors*‡? *Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin*§? A sense of the sinfulness of his nature humbles him in the dust; and the first risings of irregular inclinations and passions, give him a tender pain, with which a carnal heart is unacquainted, even when sin is domineering within him.

And once more, "The prevalence of sin in the world around him," is a grief to one that is born of God. It pierces him to the heart, to see men dishonouring God, and ruining themselves: He beholds transgressors, as David well expresses it, with a mixture of *Indignation and sorrow*‖; and when he seriously considers, how common, and yet how sad a case it is, he can perhaps borrow the words of the same prophet, so far as to say, that *Rivers of waters run down his eyes, because men keep not the law of God*¶.—Now as these are sorrows that seldom do at all affect the heart of an unregenerate man, I thought it the more proper to mention them, to assist you in your enquiries into your own state.

Such are the affections of love and aversion, of desire and fear, of joy and sorrow, which fill the breast of the regenerate man, and naturally arise from those new apprehensions, which are described under the former head. I add,

III. That he has also new resolutions.

You will easily apprehend, I speak of those that are formed for the service of God, and against sin. I readily acknowledge, that there are often, in unregenerate men, some resolutions of this kind, and perhaps those very warm, and for the present very sincere; yet there is a considerable difference between them, and

* Psal. xxx. 7. † Psal. xviii. 23. ‡ Psal. xix. 12.
§ Prov. xx. 9. ‖ Psal. cxxxix. 21. ¶ Psal. cxix. 136.

those we are now to represent; as the resolutions of the truly good man are more universal, more immediate, and more humble.

1. The resolutions which he now forms, are more universal than they ever were before.

He does not now resolve against this or that sin, but against all; against sin, as sin; as opposite to the holiness of God, and destructive of the honour and happiness of the rational creation. He does not say with Naaman, concerning this or that more convenient iniquity, *The Lord pardon thy servant in this thing**; nor does he resolve to excuse himself in an indulgence, even to that *Sin which does most easily beset him*†: But rather, in his general determination against sin, and in those solemn engagements with which such determinations may be attended, he fixes especially upon those sins, which he might before have been most ready to except.

2. The resolutions of the regenerate man are more immediate.

It very frequently happens, that while others are under awakening impressions, as they see a necessity for parting with their sins, and engaging in what they may call a religious life, they resolve upon it: But then they think it may be delayed a little longer; perhaps a few years, or at least a few weeks or days; or they, perhaps, refer it to some remarkable period which is approaching, which they flatter themselves they shall make yet more remarkable, as the Æra of their reformation: But in the mean time, they will take their farewel of their lusts by a few more indulgences; and thus they delude themselves, and rivet on their chains faster than before. But the good man, with David, *Makes haste, and delays not to keep the commandments of God*‡. He is like the Prodigal, who as soon as ever he said, *I will arise and go to my Father*, immediately *arose and came to him*§. He reckons the time he has already spent in the service of sin *may suffice*‖, and that indeed it is far more than enough: He wishes, he could call back that which is past; but he determines, that he will not take one step further in this unhappy path. He fully purposes, that he will never once more, deliberately and presumptuously offend God, in any matter, great or small; if any thing can be called small, which is a deliberate and apprehended offence: And he determines, that from this moment he will *yield himself to God, as alive from the dead,*

*2 Kings v. 18. †Heb. xii. 1. ‡Psal. cxix. 60. §Luke xv. 18, 20. ‖1 Pet. iv. 3.

and employ his *Members as instruments of righteousness**. But then,

3. His resolutions are more modest and humble, than they have ever been before.

And this indeed is the great circumstance, that renders them more effectual.—When an awakened sinner feels himself most inslaved to his vices, he pleases himself with this thought, that there is a secret kind of spring in his mind, which when he pleases to exert, he can break through all at once, and commence, whenever that unhappy necessity comes upon him, a very religious man in a moment. And when conscience presses him with the memory of past guilt, and the representation of future danger, he cuts off these remonstrances with a hasty resolve, "I will do so no more:" But then perhaps, the effect of this may not last a day; though possibly, it may at other times continue a few weeks or months, where the grosser acts of sin are concerned: And indeed his resolutions seldom reach farther than these; for the necessity of a sanctified heart is a mystery, which he has never yet learnt.——But a truly regenerate man has learnt wisdom from this experience of his own, and the observation of other men's frailty. He feels his own weakness, and is so thoroughly aware of the treachery of his own heart, that he is almost afraid to express in words the purpose which his very soul is forming: He is almost afraid to turn that purpose into a vow before God, lest the breach of that vow should increase his guilt: But this he can say, with repenting Ephraim, Lord, *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned*†; and with David, *Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my foot-steps may not slip*‡. "I am exceeding frail; but, Lord, *Be thou surety for thy servant for good*§, and then I shall be safe! Do thou rescue me from temptations, and I shall be delivered! Do thou fill my heart with holy sentiments, and I will breathe them out before thee! Do thou excite and maintain a zeal for thy service, and then I will exert myself in it!" And when once a man is come to such a distrust of himself; when like a little child, he stretches out his hand to be led by his heavenly Father, and trusts in his guardian care alone for his security and comfort; then *Out of weakness he is made strong*‖, and goes on safe, though perhaps trembling; and sees those that made the loudest boasts, and placed the greatest confidence in themselves, falling on the

* Rom. vi. 13. † Jer. xxxi. 18. ‡ Psal. xvii. 5. § Psal. cxix. 122. ‖ Heb. xi. 34.

right hand and the left, and all their bravery melting away like snow before the sun.

IV. The regenerate man has new labours and employments.

Not that his former employment in secular life is laid aside: It would ordinarily be a very dangerous snare, for a man to imagine that God requires this. On the contrary, the apostle gives it in charge to christian converts, that in what calling soever a man is found, when he is called into the profession of the gospel, he should *Therein abide with God**. But when he becomes a real christian, he prosecutes this calling, whatever it be, with a new spirit and temper, from new principles, and to new purposes. While his hands are labouring in the world, his heart is often rising to God: He consecrates his work to the divine honour, and to the credit of religion; and desires, that his merchandise, and his gain, may in this sense be *Holiness to the Lord*†, by employing it to support the family, which providence has committed to his charge‡, and to relieve the poor, which Christ recommends to his pity§: And as he depends upon God to give him wisdom and success, in the conduct of his affairs, he ascribes the glory of that success to him; not *Sacrificing to his own net*, nor *burning incense to his own drag*‖.

And I will further add, That regeneration introduces a set of new labours, added to the former, with which the man was before utterly unacquainted.——We may consider as the principal and chief of these, the great labour of purifying the heart, of conquering sinful inclinations and affections, and of approaching God by a more intimate access, and more indeared converse. Now they that imagine this to be an easy matter, know little of the human heart, little of the spirituality of God's nature and his law. Give me leave to say, that the labours of the body in cultivating the earth, are much more easily performed, than this spiritual husbandry. To weed a soil so luxuriant in evil productions, and to raise a plentiful harvest of holy affections and actions in a soil so barren of good; to regulate appetites and passions, so exorbitant as those of the human heart naturally are, and to awaken in it suitable affections; to be abundant in the fruits of righteousness, and to converse with God in the exercise of devotion: These are no little things; nor will a little resolution, watchfulness and activity suffice, in order to the discharge of such a business. It is comparatively easy, to go through the forms of prayer and praise, whatever they are; to

*1 Cor. vii. 20, 24. †Isa. xxiii. 18. ‡1 Tim. v. 8. §Acts xx. 35. ‖Hab. i. 16.

read, or from present conception to utter, a few words before God: But to unite the heart in God's service, to wrestle with him for a blessing, to pour out the heart before him, to speak to him as searching the very heart; so that he should say, "This is prayer:" This, my brethren, is a work indeed; and he that is conscientious in the discharge of it, will find, that it is not to be dispatched in a few hasty moments, nor without serious reflection, and a resolute watch maintained over the spirit.

New labours also arise to the regenerate soul, in consequence of the concern it has to promote religion in the world.—Being possessed, as I formerly shewed you the heart of the good man is, with an unfeigned love to his fellow-creatures, and knowing of how great importance religion is to the happiness of men, he pleads earnestly with God for the propagation and success of the gospel: And he endeavours, according to his ability and opportunity to promote it; to promote pure and undefiled religion in his family, and his neighbourhood, even in all around him. And this requires observation and application, that this attempt may be prudently conducted, and great resolution in order to its being rendered effectual: It requires great diligence in watching over ourselves, lest our examples prove inconsistent with our precepts; and no small degree of courage, considering how averse the generality of mankind are to admonitions and reproofs; in consequence of which, a person can hardly act the part of a faithful friend, without exposing himself to the hazard of being accounted an enemy.

Such are the new labours of the real christian: Let any man try to perform them, and he will not find them light: But to encourage the attempt, let me further add,

V. That the regenerate soul has its new entertainments too.

He has pleasures, which *A stranger intermeddles not with**, and which the world can neither give, nor take away†; pleasures, which a thousand times over-balance the most painful labours, and the most painful sufferings too; and which sweetly mingling themselves with the various circumstances of life, through which the christian passes, do as it were gild all the scene, and make all the fatigues and self-denial of his life far more agreeable, than any of those delights the worldling, or the sensualist, can find in the midst of his unbounded and studied indulgences.—But here I shall be in great danger of repeating

* Prov. xiv. 10. † John xvi. 22.

what I said under a former head, when I was speaking of the new joys, which the christian feels, in consequence of the great change that regeneration makes in his soul; And therefore omitting what I then observed, concerning the pleasure of communion with God through Christ, and of perceiving a work of divine grace upon the soul, I shall now touch upon some other sources of exalted entertainment, which did not so directly fall under that head.

1. The christian finds new pleasures in the word of God.

You know, with what relish the saints of old spake of it. *Thy words were found,* says the prophet, *and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart**. Thy statutes, says the Psalmist, *Are more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; they are sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb*†.—The apostle Peter beautifully represents this, when he exhorts the saints to whom he wrote, *As new-born babes* to *desire the sincere milk of the word, that they might grow thereby*‡. And the infant, that smiles on the breast, and with such eagerness and delight draws its nourishment from it, seems an amiable image of the humble christian, who receives the kingdom of God, and the word of that *Kingdom as a little child*§; who lays up scripture *in his heart*‖, and draws forth the sweetness of it, with a firm persuasion, that it *is indeed the Word of God,* and was appointed by him for the food of his soul.

2. He also finds new pleasures in the ordinances of divine worship.

He is *Glad, when it is said unto him, let us go into the house of the Lord*¶. He indeed esteems the *Tabernacles* of the Lord as *amiable*, and regards *a day in his courts* as *better than a thousand* elsewhere**. And this pleasure arises, not merely from any thing peculiar in the administrations of this or that man, who officiates in holy things; but from the nature of the exercise in general, and from a regard to the divine authority of those institutions, which are there observed. He feels a sacred delight, in an intercourse with God in those solemnities; in comparison of which all the graces of composition and delivery appear as little, as the harmony of instruments, or the perfume of incense, to one of the Old Testament saints, when

* Jer. xv. 16. † Psal. xix. 10. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 2. § Mark x. 15.
‖ Job xxii. 22. ¶ Psal. cxxii. 1. ** Psal. lxxxiv. 1, 10.

compared with the light of God's countenance, which was lifted up on the pious worshipper under the Mosaic forms, when *In his temple every one spake of his glory**. *One thing has he desired of the Lord*, and *that he seeks after; that he may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life;* not to amuse his vain imagination, not to gratify his ear, not to indulge his curiosity with useless enquiries, nor merely to exercise his understanding with sublime speculations; but *to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple*†.

3. He likewise finds a new entertainment in the conversation of christian friends.

He now knows what it is, to have *Fellowship with* those, whose communion *is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*‡. His *Delight is* now *in* them, that are truly *the excellent of the earth*§. He delights to dismiss the usual topics of modern conversation, that some religious subject may be assumed, not as matter of dispute, but as matter of devout recollection; and he loves to hear the plainest christian express his experimental sense of divine things. Those sentiments of piety and love, which come warm from a gracious heart, are always pleasing to him; and those appear the dearest bands of friendship, which may draw him nearer to his heavenly Father, and unite his soul in ties of more ardent love to his Redeemer. A society of such friends is indeed a kind of anticipation of heaven; and to chuse, and delight in such, is no contemptible token, that the soul has attained to some considerable degree of preparation for it. I only add,

VI. That in consequence of all this, the regenerate soul has new hopes and prospects.

Men might be very much assisted in judging of their true state, if they would seriously reflect, what it is they hope and wish for? what are those expectations and desires, that most strongly impress their minds? A vain mortal, untaught and unchanged by divine grace, is always dressing up to himself some empty phantom of earthly happiness, which he looks after and pursues; and foolishly imagines, "Could I grasp it, and keep it, I should be happy." But divine grace teaches the real christian to give up these empty schemes: "God," does he say, "never intended this world for my happiness: He will make

* Psal. xxix. 9. † Psal. xxvii. 4. ‡ 1 John i. 3. § Psal. xvi. 3.

it tolerable to me; he will give me so much of it, as he sees consistent with my highest interest; he will enable me to derive instruction, and it may be consolation, out of its disappointments and distresses: But he reserves my inheritance for the eternal world. I am *Begotten again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*, even *to* the hope of *an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away**: And though it be for the present *reserved in heaven*, it is so safe, and so great, that it is well worth my waiting for, though ever so long; for *The things which are not seen, are eternal*†." And this indeed is the true character of a good man. Eternity fills his thoughts; and growing sensible, in another manner than he ever was before, of the importance of it, he pants after the enjoyment of eternal happiness. Assign any limited duration to his enjoyment of God in the regions of glory, and you would overwhelm him with disappointment: Talk of hundreds, of thousands, of millions of years, the disappointment is almost equal: Periods like these, seem scarce distinguishable from each other, when compared with an eternal hope. To eternity his desires and expectations are raised; and he can be contented with nothing less than eternity: Perfect holiness, and perfect happiness for ever and ever, without any mixture of sin, or any allay of sorrow; this he firmly expects, this he ardently breathes after; a felicity, which an immortal soul shall never outlive, and which an eternal God shall never cease to communicate. This *Heavenly country* he seeks; he considers himself as *a citizen* of it, and endeavours to maintain his *conversation* there‡; to carry on, as it were, a daily trade for heaven, and to *Lay up a treasure* there§; in which he may be rich and great, when all the pomp of this earth is passed away as a dream, and all its most precious metals and gems are melted down and consumed among its vilest materials in the last universal burning.

This is the change, the glorious change which regeneration makes, in a man's character and views: And who shall dare to speak, or to think, contemptibly of it? Were we indeed to represent it as a kind of charm, depending on an external ceremony, which it was the peculiar prerogative of a certain order of men to perform, and yet on which eternal life was suspended; one might easily apprehend, that it would be brought into much suspicion. Or should we place it in any mechanical transports of animal nature, in any blind impulse, in any strong feelings, not to be described, or accounted for, or argued upon, but

*1 Pet. i. 3, 4. †2 Cor. iv. 18. ‡Phil. iii. 20. §Mat. vi. 20.

known by some inward inexplicable sensation to be divine; we could not wonder, if calm and prudent men were slow to admit the pretension to it, and were fearful it might end in the most dangerous enthusiasm, made impious by excessive appearances of piety.—But when it is delineated by such fair and bright characters, as those that have now been drawn; when these divine lineaments on the soul, by which it bears the image of its Maker's rectitude and sanctity, are considered as its necessary consequence, or rather as its very essence; one would imagine, that every rational creature, instead of cavilling at it, should pay an immediate homage to it, and earnestly desire, and labour, and pray, to experience the change: Especially as it is a change so desirable for itself; as we acknowledge health to be, though a man were not to be rewarded, for being well; nor punished, any farther than with the malady he contracts, for any negligence in this respect.

Where is there any thing can be more ornamental to our natures, than to have all the powers of the mind thus changed by grace, and our pursuits directed to such objects, as are worthy of the best attention and regard?—To have our apprehensions of divine and spiritual things enlarged, and to have right conceptions of the most important matters;—to have the stream of our affections turned from empty vanities, to objects that are proper to excite and fix them;—to have our resolutions set against all sin, and a full purpose formed within us of an immediate reformation and return to God, with a dependance on his grace to help us both to will and to do;—to have our labours stedfastly applied, to conquer sin, and to promote religion in ourselves and others;—to have our entertainments founded in a religious life, and flowing in upon us from the sweet intercourse we have with God in his word and ordinances, and the delightful conversation that we sometimes have with christian friends;—and finally, to have our hopes drawn off from earthly things, and fixed upon eternity?—Where is there any thing can be more honourable to us, than thus to be *Renewed after the image of him that created us**, and to *Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*†?—And where is any thing that can be more desirable, than thus to have the darkness of our understandings cured, and the disorders rectified, that sin had brought upon our nature? Who is there that is so insensible of his depravity, as that he would not long for such a happy change? Or who is there that knows how excellent

* Col. iii. 10. † Eph. iv. 24.

a work it is, to be *Transformed by the renewing of the mind**, that would not with the greatest thankfulness adore the riches of divine grace, if it appear that he is thus become a new creature; that *old things are passed away, and behold, all things are become new?*

But I shall quickly shew you, that regeneration is not only ornamental, honourable, and desirable; but absolutely necessary, as ever we would hope to share the blessings of God's heavenly kingdom, and to escape the horror of those, that are finally, and irrevocably excluded from it. This argument will employ several succeeding discourses: But I would dismiss you at present with an earnest request, that you would in the mean time renew your enquiries, as to the truth of regeneration in your own souls; which, after all that I have been saying, it will be very inexcusable for you to neglect, as probably you will hear few discourses in the whole course of your lives, which centre more directly in this point, or are more industriously calculated to give you the safest and clearest assistance in it. May God abase the arrogance and presumption of every self-deceiving sinner, and awaken the confidence and joy of the feeblest soul, in whom this new creation is begun!

* Rom. xii. 2.

SERMON IV.

ON REGENERATION.

The Necessity of Regeneration argued, from the immutable Constitution of God.

John iii. 3.—*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.*

WHILE the ministers of Christ are discoursing of such a subject, as I have before me in the course of these lectures, and particularly in this branch of them which I am now entering upon, we may surely, with the utmost reason, address our hearers, in those words of Moses to Israel, in the conclusion of his dying discourse: *Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day; which ye shall command your children to observe and do*, even *all the words of this law; for it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life**. That must undoubtedly be your life, concerning which the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the incarnate wisdom of God, *The faithful and true witness*†, has said, and said it with a solemn repeated asseveration, that without it a Man *cannot see the kingdom of God.*

The occasion of his saying it deserves our notice; though the niceties of the context must be waved in such a series of sermons as this. He said it to a Jew of considerable rank, and, as it appears, one of the grand Sanhedrim, or chief council of the nation; who came not only for his own private satisfaction, but in the name of several of his brethren, to discourse with Christ concerning his doctrine, at the first passover he attended at Jerusalem, after he had entered on his public ministry. Our Lord, would, to be sure, be peculiarly careful, what answer he returned to such an enquiry: And this is his answer, *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God:* As if he should have said, "If the princes of Israel enquire after my character, let them know,

* Deut. xxxii. 46, 47. † Rev. iii. 14.

that I came to be a preacher of regeneration; and that the blessings of that kingdom which I am come to reveal and erect, are to be peculiar to renewed and sanctified souls; who may, by an easy and natural figure, be said to be *born again*." And the figure appears very intelligible, and very instructive to those, that will seriously consider it; and might lead us into a variety of pertinent and useful remarks.

You easily perceive, that to be born again, must intimate a very great change; coming, as it were, into a new world, as an infant does; when after having lived a while a kind of vegetative life in the darkness and confinement of the womb, it is born into open day; feels the vital air rushing in on its lungs, and light forcing itself upon the awakened eyes; hears sounds before unknown; opens its mouth to receive a yet untasted food; and every day becomes acquainted with new objects, and exerts new powers, till it grows up to the maturity of *a perfect man*. Such, and in some respects greater and nobler than this, is the change which regeneration makes in a heart, before unacquainted with religion; as you may have seen at large from the preceding discourses.

But I might further observe, that the phrase in the text may also express the humbling nature of this change, as well as the greatness of it. Erasmus gives this turn to the words; and it is so edifying, that I should have mentioned it at least, though I had not thought it so just, as it appears. To be born again, must signify *To become as a little child**; and our Lord expressly and frequently assures us, that without this *We cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven*†. He has pronounced the very first of his blessings on *Poverty of spirit*‡; and where this is wanting, the soul will never be entitled to the rest. A mild and humble, a docile and tractable temper, a freedom from avarice and ambition, and an indifference to those great toys of which men are generally so fond, are all essential parts of the christian character; and they have all, in one view or another, been touched upon in the preceding discourses. Let it be forgiven however, if, considering the importance of the case, you are told again, that *In malice ye must be children*§; and that *If any man think himself wise, he must become* a child, and even *a fool, that he may be wise* indeed‖.

I might observe once more, that these words intimate the divine power, by which this great and humbling change is

* Mat. xviii. 3. † Mark x. 15. Luke xviii. 17. ‡ Mat. v. 3.
§ 1 Cor. xiv. 20. ‖ 1 Cor. iii. 18.

effected. Our first formation and birth is the work of God, and no less really so in the succeeding generations of men, than the first production of Adam was, when *God formed him of the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life**. We may each of us say, with respect to the natural birth, and in an accommodated sense with respect to the spiritual too, *Thine eyes did see my substance, being as yet imperfect, and in thy book all my members, which in continuance of* time *were fashioned, were written, when as yet there was none of them*†. All the first gracious impressions that were made upon the mind, and all the gradual advances of them, till Christ was formed in the heart, and the new creature animated, must, as I shall hereafter shew at large, be ultimately and principally referred into a divine operation; and in this sense, it is *God* that *brings* every good purpose in the mind *to the birth*, and God that *gives strength to bring forth*‡.

But I omit the farther prosecution of these remarks at present, because they coincide with what I have said in former discourses, or what will occur in those which are yet to come: And shall only further consider the words, as they are a confirmation of, and therefore a proper introduction to what I am to lay before you under the third general head of these discourses; in which, as I have already shewn, who may be said to be in an unregenerate state, and how great that change is which regeneration makes in the soul, I shall now proceed,

Thirdly, To shew the high importance, yea, the absolute necessity of this change.

Our Lord expresses it in a very lively and awakening manner, in these few determinate words, which are here before us: *Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* You see how emphatical the words are: He who is himself invariable truth, *The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*§, repeats it again and again, with as much solemnity as he ever uses upon any occasion; repeats it to us, as he did to Nicodemus, "*Verily, verily I say unto you*, that is, I seriously deliver it as a truth of infinite moment; *except a man*, i. e. any man, whatever his profession, whatever his knowledge, or whatever his privileges may be; though he be a Jew, though he be a Pharisee, though he be, as thou Nicodemus art, a ruler, or a senator; except he *be born again*, and

*Gen. ii. 7. †Psal. cxxxix. 16. ‡Isa. lxvi. 9. §Heb. xiii. 8.

have that great change, so often described in the word of God, wrought by the operation *of the Spirit* in his mind, *he cannot see the kingdom of God:* He cannot by an means approach it, so as to enter into it, or have any share in the important blessings which it contains."

That we may more fully understand, and enter into this weighty argument, I shall from these words,

I. Briefly consider, what it is to *see the kingdom of God.*
II. Shew, how absolutely impossible it is, that any unregenerate man should see it. And,
III. How wretched a thing it is, to be deprived of the sight, and enjoyment of it.

And I am well persuaded, that if you diligently attend to these things, you will be inwardly and powerfully convinced, that no argument could be more proper to demonstrate the importance and necessity of regeneration, than this, which our Lord has suggested in these awful, emphatical, and comprehensive words.

I. I am to shew you, what it is to see the kingdom of God.

And for the explication of it, it will be necessary to consider,——what we are to understand by this kingdom;——and what is meant by seeing it.

[1.] I would shew you, what we are to understand by *the kingdom of God.*

And you will pardon me, if I state the matter pretty largely; because the phrase is used in scripture in different senses; and the true interpretation of many passages in it depends on a proper distinction between them. You may observe then for the explication of this phrase,——that *the kingdom of God* in general signifies "the society of those, who profess themselves the servants and subjects of Christ;" and in consequence of this,——that there are some passages, in which it peculiarly relates to "the imperfect dispensation of this kingdom, and the beginning of it in the world;"——and others, in which it relates to "the more perfect form, which this society is to bear in the world of glory."

1. The kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven (for they are synonymous phrases,) does in the general signify "the society of those, who profess themselves the servants and subjects of Christ."

You well know, this was a phrase used among the Jews;

and therefore the original of it is to be traced from the Old Testament: And I apprehend it to be this. Almost every christian is aware, that in the early days of the Jewish commonwealth, as Samuel with great propriety expresses it, *God was their King**. Jehovah was not only the great object of their religious regard, as the creator and supporter of the whole world; but he was also their supreme civil magistrate, settling the forms of their political government, and reserving to himself some of the chief acts of royal authority. They did indeed afterwards desire another *King*, *like the other nations* round about them†. But still those kings, being appointed by God, were indeed to be looked upon as no other than his vicegerents, though another kind of governors than he originally instituted. By degrees their peculiar regard to the civil authority of God among them, as well as to his religious authority which was nearly connected with it, in a great measure wore out; and their government went through a great many different forms, which it would be unnecessary here particularly to describe. Nevertheless God was pleased to declare by King David, and by many others of his holy prophets, that he would in due time interpose to erect another, and a far more extensive kingdom in the world: Not indeed upon the same political principles, with that which he exercised over the Jews; which principles would by no means have suited this extensive design: But it should be a kingdom, in which the authority of the God of heaven should be acknowledged, and his laws of universal righteousness observed, with greater care, and to nobler purposes, as well as by a vastly greater number of subjects, than ever before. This kingdom he determined to commit to the government of the Messiah, who with regard to this was called *The Lord's anointed*, *his king* whom *he set upon his holy hill of Zion*‡; and to whom indeed he would *Give all power*, not only *on earth*, but *in heaven* too§; so that having trained up his subjects here, in the discipline of holiness and obedience, he should at length translate them to another and *a better country*, *that is*, *an heavenly*, where they should see his glory, and should reign with him in eternal life.

This plainly appears, from the whole tenor of the Old and New Testament, to have been the grand plan of God, with respect to the Messiah's kingdom: And you will easily see, that coming from God, as its great author, and referring to

* 1 Sam. xii. 12. † 1 Sam. viii. 5. ‡ Psal. ii. 2, 6. § Mat. xxviii. 18.

him as its end, it may, with great propriety, be called *the kingdom of God;* and ultimately terminating in the heavenly state, it may also properly be called *the kingdom of heaven.* These were phrases, which prevailed in the jewish nation, before Christ, or his immediate *forerunner* appeared: And indeed they were used by Daniel, in a very remarkable manner, which probably made them so familiar to the Jews, who had some peculiar reasons for studying his writings, even more than those of some other prophets. After that prophet had foretold the rise and fall of several great empires of the world, he adds, *And in the days of these* last *kings*, i. e. of the Romans, *shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall not be destroyed,—but shall stand for ever**. And the person, whom *the ancient of days*, i. e. the eternal and ever-blessed God, should fix on the throne of this kingdom, from his appearing in the human nature, is called *The son of man*†: *I saw in the night-visions, and behold one like the son of man, came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him: And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.*

In allusion to this, when our Lord Jesus Christ appeared, he called himself *The son of man:* and he particularly used this phrase, as it was exceedingly proper that he should, in this conference with Nicodemus, again and again‡. And all those, who being convinced of the divine commission he bore, submitted themselves to him, might in this respect be said, to *enter into the kingdom of God*, or *of heaven;* that is, into the society which had so long been foretold, and expected, under that title. This kingdom, as the above-mentioned prophecy declared, was to be raised from very low beginnings, under the personal ministry of Christ and his apostles, till at last it should extend through very distant regions of the world, and kings and princes should submit themselves to it, and reckon it their glory to enrol themselves among his subjects.

Agreeable to this meaning of the phrase, and to this view with respect to the establishment of his kingdom, our Lord opened his ministry, with preaching, as John the baptist had done, *the kingdom of heaven*§. And you will see, that in most places of the gospel, where the phrase occurs, it is to be taken in this sense. Thus our Lord says, *Blessed are the poor*

* Dan. ii. 44. † Dan. vii. 13, 14. ‡ John iii. 13, 14. § Mat. iii. 2. iv. 17.

*in spirit; for theirs, is the kingdom of heaven** ; i. e. they are fit to be members of this society, and to receive the blessings of it. *See first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*† ; i. e. labour to serve the interest of this society that I am erecting, and to obtain and promote that righteousness, which it recommends, and is intended to establish in the world. And again, *Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God*‡ : Persons with such a disposition are most fit to become my subjects, and to enter into this holy and spiritual society. And when our Lord says to the pharisees, *Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you*§ ; he means, no doubt, they are more ready than you, to join themselves to the society of those, who profess themselves my subjects. And once more, when he speaks of some, who chose the severities of a single life, that with less entanglements they might serve the interests of his church, he expresses it, by their *Making themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake*‖.

I shall only add, that the phrase, by a near connection with this sense, sometimes signifies the charter of this society, or the privileges which it affords to its members ; as when our Lord says, *Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein*¶.

This then is the general sense of this phrase : It signifies " the society of those, who should submit themselves to the government of Christ, as appointed by God to rule over them ; who are thereby to be considered as God's people and subjects." In consequence of this, you will easily apprehend,

2. That it comprehends " the more imperfect dispensation, under which the members of this society are, during their abode in the present world."

All that passes here, is indeed but the opening of Christ's kingdom : Nevertheless the phrase does sometimes more particularly refer to this opening ; and there are several passages, in which it would be apparently absurd, to suppose it comprehended the glories of the invisible state, to which Christ intended finally to conduct his faithful servants. Thus our Lord tells the pharisees, *The kingdom of God is come unto you*** , i. e. that gracious dispensation under the Messiah, by which God is gathering subjects to his son. And elsewhere he says to them,

* Mat. v. 3. † Mat. vi. 33. ‡ Luke xviii. 16. § Mark xxi. 31.
‖ Mat. xix. 12. ¶ Luke xviii. 17. ** Mat. xii. 28.

The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, i. e. not with such outward shew and grandeur as you expect; but *behold, it is within*, or (as it might be rendered), *among you**: God has begun to open and establish it, though you know it not; and has actually brought many poor sinners into it, whom you proudly deride, as ignorant and accursed. Thus also when our Lord says to Peter, *I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven*†, it would be most absurd to suppose, he meant to grant to him the power of admitting into, or excluding from the world of glory: But the plain meaning is, that he should bear a distinguished office in the church upon earth, and be the means of admitting Jews and Gentiles into it. Here, as in many other instances, the kingdom of God, or of heaven, means much the same with the professing church of Christ, during its settlement in this imperfect state: As it undoubtedly does, when Christ threatens his hearers, that *The kingdom of God should be taken away from them*‡: And when he represents it, as consisting of *Good and bad*§, of *Tares and wheat*‖; but declares, that at the last day he *Will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity*¶; whereas nothing of that kind shall ever enter into the kingdom of glory. But yet,

3. It ultimately relates to "the more perfect form and state of this society in the kingdom of glory."

You very well know, that the design of God in his gospel, was not to establish a temporal kingdom, as the Jews expected; nor merely to form a body of men, who should live upon earth with some peculiar forms of worship, under very excellent rules, and with distinguished privileges of a spiritual nature; but that all these ultimately referred to the invisible world. Thither the Son of man was removed, when he had finished the scenes of his labour and sufferings upon earth; and thither all the true and faithful members of the kingdom were sooner or later to be brought, and there were to have their final settlement, and everlasting abode, in a far more splendid and happy state, than the greatest monarch on earth has ever known: They shall there, as the apostle most properly expresses it, *Reign in life by Jesus Christ***. Now as the kingdom of God upon earth is to be considered with a leading view to this; so we sometimes find, that this glorious state of its members, or which will come

* Luke xvii. 20, 21. † Mat. xvi. 19. ‡ Mat. xxi. 43. § Mat. xiii. 48.
‖ Ver. 25. ¶ Ver. 41. ** Rom. v. 17.

much to the same thing, the society of the faithful in this glorious state, is, by way of eminence, called *the kingdom of God:* And with regard to this, they whose characters are such that they shall be excluded from thence, are represented as having no part in *the kingdom of heaven*, though they have been by profession members of the church of Christ on earth. Of this you have a remarkable instance, where our Lord says, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven**: Now it was calling Christ Lord, or professing a regard to him as a divine Teacher and Governor, which was the very circumstance, that distinguished the members of his kingdom on earth from the rest of mankind: Yet as they who do this insincerely, shall be excluded from final glory, it is said, they shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.—So also the apostle tells us, that *Flesh and blood*, i. e. such gross machines of animal nature as those in which we now dwell, *cannot inherit the kingdom of God*†; they cannot dwell in so pure a region; and therefore it is necessary, that before they enter upon it, those who are found alive at the illustrious day of Christ's appearance, should undergo a miraculous change, to fit them for such an abode.—In reference to this we are likewise told, that *Then*, i. e. at the great resurrection-day, *the righteous shall shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father*‡.—And this is what our Lord most certainly had in view, when he tells the impenitent Jews, that *There should be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when they should see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and they themselves thrust out*§: Which could not be meant of the privileges of the christian church upon earth, in which the Patriarchs had no share; nor did the Jews at all envy those professing christians, who most evidently had: It must undoubtedly therefore be numbered among those passages, in which the kingdom of heaven chiefly refers to the state of glory. And I apprehend, the text here before us may be added to that catalogue; which leads me to shew,

2. What we are to understand by *seeing the kingdom of God.*

Now in general you will easily apprehend, that to *see the kingdom* is to enjoy the blessings of it.—There is no need of enumerating many passages of scripture, where to see properly

* Mat. vii. 21. † 1 Cor. xv. 50. ‡ Mat. xiii. 43. § Luke xiii. 28.

signifies to enjoy. This is apparently the sense of it, when Christ declares, *Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God**: For the Deity cannot be the object of sight; but the promise is, that such souls (Oh that we may be in their number!) shall for ever enjoy the most delightful communications from him. And thus again we are to understand it, where it is said, *What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see*, i. e. that he may enjoy *good*†? For otherwise, to see it without enjoying it would be a great aggravation of misery and distress. And in this sense it is most evident, that *seeing the kingdom of God* must here be put, for enjoying the chief and most important blessings appropriated to this happy state; because, as I have just been observing, condemned sinners are represented in another sense, as seeing that kingdom and the glorified saints in it; but viewing it only at an unapproachable distance, as a spectacle that fills them with horror and despair.

This therefore, is, upon the whole, the meaning of this passage: "That no unregenerate soul shall finally have any part in the glory and happiness which Christ has prepared for his faithful subjects; nor can any that appear to be such, according to the tenor and constitution of the gospel, be admitted into the number even of professing christians." It is true indeed a man may appear under such a disguise, that those who are in this sense the *Stewards of the mysteries of God*‡, may in the judgment of charity, be obliged to think well of him, and to admit him: But Christ, who intimately knows him, does even now discern him. The present external privileges he enjoys, are such as he has no just right to; and in a little time, Christ will *root him out of this kingdom* with a vengeance, and he shall be openly declared a rebel, and one whom the Lord of it *never knew*, or never approved §. So that upon the whole, it is so little a part that he had in the kingdom, and that for so short a time, that it may, in the free language of scripture, be said that he has never seen the kingdom of God at all; that he has *Neither part nor lot in this matter*‖; has no part with God's chosen, nor any lot with his inheritance.

Having thus largely explained the meaning of this phrase, I now proceed,

* Mat. v. 8. † Psal. xxxiv. 12. ‡ 1 Cor. iv. 1.
§ Mat. vii. 23. ‖ Acts viii. 21.

II. To shew you, how certain this declaration of our Lord in the text is, or how absolutely impossible it is, that any unregenerate man should thus see the kingdom of God.

Now this I shall argue,—partly "from the immutable constitution of God, whose kingdom it is;"—and partly "from the nature of its blessings, which are such, that no unregenerate man, while he continues in that state, can have any fitness or capacity to enjoy them."

The first of these considerations is copious and important enough, to furnish out abundant matter for the remainder of this discourse; and it will be difficult to dispatch it within these limits.

[1.] The impossibility there is that any unregenerate man should enter into the kingdom of God, appears "from the immutable constitution of that God, whose kingdom it is."

This might be sufficiently argued from the express and emphatical words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the text. For he bore his Father's commission, to preach the gospel of the kingdom, to publish the good news of its erection and success, and likewise to declare its nature, and the method of admittance into it. And he is himself the great sovereign of that kingdom; and consequently cannot but perfectly, and beyond all comparison with any other, know the whole of its constitution.—But God has repeated the declaration by him, and by his other messengers to the children of men in different ages, and under different dispensations, in such a manner as suited its infinite importance.—And therefore, for the farther illustration of the argument, I shall enumerate a great variety of scriptures that speak the same language; not so much aiming therein at the speculative proof of the point, as attempting to impress the consciences of my hearers with a sense of its certainty; and humbly hoping that some of those sharp-pointed *arrows*, which I am now drawing out of the *quiver of God*, may, by the direction of his Spirit, *enter the reins* of some against whom they are levelled*, and convince them of the absolute necessity of an entire change in their hearts, as well as their lives, or of the vanity of all those hopes which they entertain, while that change is wanting. And let me bespeak your attention, not to the conjectures or reasonings of a frail mortal man, but to the solemn

* Lam. iii. 13.

admonitions and declarations of the eternal God; and be assured, that in one sense or another, his word shall take hold on you, as it has done on sinners of former generations, either for conviction, or condemnation.

That I may not be confounded in the multiplicity of my proofs, I shall range them under these three distinct heads.—The prophets of the Old Testament were commissioned to make this declaration:—It was renewed by the preaching of Christ;—and was supported by the testimony of the apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

1. The prophets of the Old Testament were commissioned in effect to make this declaration, that no unregenerate sinners should enter into the kingdom of God.

Well might our Lord say to Nicodemus, *Art thou a teacher in Israel, and knowest not these things**?* For to this in effect all the *prophets bear witness*, and it might be learned from almost every page of their writings. It is true, the particular phrase of being born again, or regenerated, does not occur there; nor is it expressly said, that an unregenerate man shall not be admitted into God's kingdom. But then the prophets every where assert, what is in effect the same, that no wicked man, who does not heartily repent of his sins and turn from them to God, must expect the divine favour. Now if you consider what we mean by an unregenerate man, according to the description I have given before, you will find it is just the same as an impenitent sinner: And if it be declared, that such are not to expect the divine favour, nay, that they must certainly prove the objects of his displeasure, this must certainly imply an exclusion from his kingdom, and must intend a great deal more than being deprived of everlasting happiness. And thus you see, that all those scriptures, which speak of the irreconcileable hatred of God against sin, and against all impenitent sinners, come in to do service here, and are equivalent to the declaration in the text. And I may hereafter shew you, that there are many scriptures in the Old Testament, which lead men to consider that change, said to be so necessary, as what must be effected by a divine operation on their souls. But, as that will more properly come in under a following head, I shall at present content myself with selecting a few scriptures, as a specimen of many hundreds more, in proof of the main point before us; and I beseech you, that

* John iii. 10.

you would endeavour to enter, not only into the sense, but into the spirit of them.

You well know, that unregenerate sinners are wicked men; and of such it is said, *God is angry with the wicked every day**; or all the day long, as the original imports. The sinner lies down and rises up, goes out and comes in, under the divine displeasure; and though with great patience God bears with him for a while, he is described as preparing his dreadful artillery against him, to smite him even with a mortal wound: So far will he be from admitting him into his kingdom, that as it is there added, *If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he has bent his bow, and made it ready. He has also prepared for him the instruments of death*†. And in another place, he describes the dreadful consequence of that preparation in most lively terms: *If I whet my glittering sword, and my hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me: I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh, from the beginning of revenges on the enemy;* i. e. as soon as I begin this awful work‡. And elsewhere he compares the destruction, which he will bring upon sinners at last, to that which he executed on Sodom and Gomorrah, when he scattered fire and brimstone on their habitations, and reduced their pleasant country to a burning lake: *Upon the wicked he will rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this will be the portion of their cup*§; and oh, how unlike the state and abode of those who are the happy subjects of his kingdom!

None of the prophets speak in milder and more gentle language to returning penitents, than Isaiah; yet he declares, *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked*‖. Yea, he does, as it were, call in the concurrence of all who feared God, and who loved their country, to echo back and enforce the admonition: *Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him;* but, on the other hand, *Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him*¶.

The enumeration would be endless; and it would require more than the time of a whole discourse only to read over, without any comment or remark, one half of the passages which might properly be introduced on this occasion. I will therefore only mention two more, which, though some of you may hear with indifference, I confess I cannot read without a very sensible inward commotion.

* Psal. vii. 11. † Ver. 12, 13. ‡ Deut. xxxii. 41, 42. § Psal. xi. 6.
‖ Isa. lvii. 21. ¶ Isa. iii. 10, 11.

The one is that passage in the Mosaic law, where God directs his servant to say, if *There be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood*, or any unregenerate soul, who *when he hears the words of this curse*, shall *bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst*, and run into one debauchery and sin after another: *The Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy, shall smoke* and be inflamed *against that man;——and the Lord shall separate him unto evil, out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant, that are written in the book of the law**. There is a terrible emphasis, of which we cannot but take notice here: God declares, that if, among all the thousands of Israel, there was but one such presumptuous sinner, that thus *flattered himself in the way of his own heart*, he would make a terrible example of him, and separate that one man to evil, out of thousands and ten thousands of his faithful and obedient servants.

This therefore is a passage full of apparent terror: The other is indeed a language of mercy; but it contains a most awful insinuation, which appears, as good Archbishop Tillotson expresses it, "like a razor set in oil, which wounds with so much the keener edge." *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel*† ? thereby plainly intimating, that, notwithstanding all that gentleness of the divine nature, which he expresses in a most tender invitation, which he confirms even with the solemnity of an oath; yet, if sinners did not *turn from their evil ways*, there was no remedy, but they must die for it.

And how, Sirs, will any of you that continue in an unregenerate state arm yourselves against these terrors? Is it by saying, "that these are the thunders of Mount Sinai; that these are denunciations of the Old Testament; whereas the New speaks in milder language?" You may easily know the contrary; and to this purpose I am farther to shew you,

2. That this declaration was renewed by the preaching of Christ.

It is true indeed that *Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*‡: Yet all the grace and gentleness of that administration he brought, did not contradict those awful threatenings; nay, it obliged him to set them in a stronger light.—He pre-

* Deut. xxix. 18—21. † Ezek. xxxiii. 11. ‡ John i. 17.

sently repeats to Nicodemus what he had just before asserted in the text, and declares, *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God**; i. e. "As he must be baptized with water, in order to a regular entrance into the society of my people, so he must also be sanctified and transformed by the cleansing and renewing influences of the spirit, signified by the water there used, or he can have no part in the blessings which my gospel brings."—And that this must produce an universal change in the life as well as the heart, and a faithful subjection to the will of God, without which no profession will stand a man in any stead, our Lord solemnly declares in the conclusion of his incomparable discourse on the mount. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven: Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity*†. And shall you, Sirs, merely for having a name and place in his house, escape; when those that have preached his gospel, and wrought miracles in confirmation of it; when those that personally conversed with Christ, and those that ministered unto him, shall perish, if destitute of a holy temper of heart, and of its solid fruit in their lives?—Has not our Lord expressly said, that *He will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity; and will cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*‡?—Nay, in his infinite compassion he has given to sinners, as it were, a copy of the sentence, that will another day be pronounced upon them; that they may meditate upon it, and review it, and judge whether they can bear the terror of its execution: Hear it attentively, and then say whether unregenerate sinners shall enter into his kingdom. The dreadful doom is this; *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*§. And what now will you say to this? Can any soul of you imagine, that the Lord Jesus Christ did not know what would pass in this day, in which he is appointed to preside? or that knowing it, and knowing it would be something different from this, he would, on any consideration whatsoever, make a false representation, and lay so much stress upon it? Yet one or other of these things you must secretly imagine; or must own,

* John iii. 5. † Mat. vii. 21, 22, 23. ‡ Mat. xiii. 41, 42. § Mat. xxv. 41.

that every unregenerate sinner, and you among the rest, must not only be excluded from his presence, but be condemned to suffer all the fury of his wrath, in company with devils and damned spirits, in final darkness, and everlasting burnings. It only remains, that I shew you,

3. That the same testimony was renewed by the apostles, under the influences of the Holy Spirit.

You know, that they were authorized by their great master, to declare, in an authentic manner, the constitution of his kingdom; and that he who *Despises them, despises Christ**. Now I would fain persuade you all to consider this argument as it lies in scripture; to read over the epistolary parts of the New Testament, in this view, to observe what encouragement they any of them give to an unregenerate sinner, to expect any part of *the kingdom of heaven.* In the mean time, permit me to present you with a few texts as a specimen of the rest.

The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, does indeed speak of God's *Justifying the ungodly*†; but lest any should vainly imagine that he encourages the hope of those that continue so, he expressly tells us in the very same epistle, that *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*‡; and that ere long this wrath shall be executed, even in the day of the more ample *Revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds:—To them that do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness*, which is the character of every unregenerate sinner, *Indignation and wrath*; *Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first*, as having had the most signal advantages, though advantages inferior to yours, *and also of the Gentile*§. And farther he assures us, that to be carnally minded, is death; and that *the carnal mind*, which universally prevails in men, till by regenerating grace they are made spiritual, *is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*‖.——In another epistle, he mentions it as a first principle, in which it might rationally be supposed, no christian was uninstructed; *Know ye not*, says he, *that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God*¶?— And elsewhere he declares, that all external modes of religion, separate from that entire change of soul which I have described, are worthless and vain: In Christ Jesus, says he, or to those

* Luke x. 16. † Rom. iv. 5. ‡ Rom. i. 18. § Rom. ii. 5, 6, 8, 9.
‖ Rom. viii. 6, 7. ¶ 1 Cor. vi. 9.

that desire any part in him and his kingdom, *Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature**.——He likewise tells us to this purpose, in another place, that his *Grace*, which *has appeared unto all men, teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts*, and *to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*† ; and yet after all to acknowledge, that it is *Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saves us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he has shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour*‡.——And *Without holiness*, which is the effect of these sacred operations upon the soul, he expressly tells us, in another place, that *no man shall see the Lord*§.——And to alledge but one more passage from him : As it is evident, that all unregenerate sinners, and only they, are ignorant of God, and disobedient to the gospel ; he solemnly assures us, that instead of receiving such at last into his kingdom, *The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power*‖.——This is the testimony of the apostle Paul in his own emphatical words, zealous as he was for the doctrine of free grace, which such declarations as these do not in the least degree contradict.

Let us now hear his brethren, the other apostles of the Lord.——James urges sinners, if they ever desire to *Draw nigh to God*, and to have him *draw nigh to them*, to *cleanse their hands, and purify their hearts*¶. And yet more expressly he says, when he speaks of those, who should *Receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him : Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures***.——The apostle Peter describes christians, as those whose souls were *Purified in obeying the truth through the spirit ; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible*†† ; and as those, who were made *Partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*‡‡ ?——Again, John, the beloved disciple, tells us that *Every one that doeth righteous-*

* Gal. vi. 15. † Tit. ii. 11, 12. ‡ Tit. iii. 5, 6. § Heb. xii. 14.
‖ 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 9. ¶ Jam. iv. 8. ** Jam. i. 12, 18. †† 1 Pet. i. 22, 23.
‡‡ 2 Pet. i. 4.

*ness, is born of God**; but *He that committeth sin is of the devil†*: And that every one that has a well-grounded hope of *Being like Christ, and seeing him as he is, when he appears, purifies himself, even as he is pure‡*.——And once more, the apostle Jude, as he describes those who are *Sensual and have not the spirit*, as men, that, if they were saved at all, must be *plucked out of the fire§*; so he echoes back that awful prophecy, which Enoch had so long since delivered, that *The Lord will come with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all that are ungodly, of all* those *ungodly deeds and words*, by which they have violated his law‖.

This then appears, from the whole tenor of the scriptures, to be the positive and immutable constitution of the great God, "that none who are unregenerate, shall be admitted to enjoy the happiness of heaven." And from the view that we have taken of the sacred writings it is manifest, that this in every age has been the language of the word of God; and under every dispensation we have sufficient evidence of this important truth. This is the doctrine of the Old Testament; and many are the passages that I have offered from the law of Moses, and from the prophets, and the psalms, that shew it is impossible an unrenewed soul should enter into heaven. And the same also is asserted in the strongest terms in the New Testament; and when Christ came to set the gospel of the kingdom in a clearer light, the purport of the declaration that he makes to Nicodemus in the text, was frequently repeated by him in the course of his preaching, and represented as the rule he would regard at the last day. And the inspired apostles speak the same thing with an united voice, and testify at large in their epistles, that it is absolutely necessary we should be born again, if ever we would hope to *see the kingdom of God*.

So that now, Sirs, I may say, *Call, if there will be any that will answer; and to which of the saints will you turn*¶, to encourage your vain and presumptuous hope, of finding your lot among God's people in the kingdom of glory, if you are strangers to that important and universal change, which we before described as regeneration in the scripture sense of the word? The prophets under the Old Testament, and Christ and his apostles under the New, concur, in all the variety of the most awful language, to expose so presumptuous a hope. And is it not audacious madness in any, to venture their souls upon

* 1 John ii. 29. † 1 John iii. 8. ‡ 1 John iii. 2, 3.
§ Jude, ver. 19, 23. ‖ Jude, ver. 14, 15. ¶ Job v. 1.

it? Thus you would undoubtedly judge of any man, who should strike a dagger into his breast, or discharge a pistol at his head, on this presumption, that the almighty power of God could prevent his death, though the heart or the brain were pierced. But it is much greater folly, for a man, while he continues in an unregenerate state, to promise himself a part in *the kingdom of heaven*. For though there would be no reason in the world to expect a miraculous interposition, to save a life which a man was so resolutely bent to destroy: yet none can say, that such an interposition would contradict any of the express engagements of God's word; whereas to admit an unregenerate sinner into the regions of glory, would be violating, not this or that single declaration, but the whole series and tenor of it: And we shall farther shew, in the next discourse, that it would also be, in effect, altering the very nature of the heavenly kingdom itself, as well as its constitution. Now what hope can be more desperate, than that which can have no support but in the subversion of the Redeemer's kingdom, and even of the eternal throne of God, the foundations of which are righteousness and truth!

SERMON V.

ON REGENERATION.

Of the Incapacity of an unregenerate Person for relishing the Enjoyments of the heavenly World.

John iii. 3.——*Except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.*

IN order to demonstrate the necessity of regeneration, of which I would fain convince, not only your understandings, but your consciences, I am now proving to you, that without it, it is impossible *to enter into the kingdom of God:* And how weighty a consideration that is, I am afterwards to represent.

That it is thus impossible, the words in the text do indeed sufficiently prove: But for the farther illustration of the subject, I have proposed to consider it under two distinct views.

I have already shewn, it is impossible, because the "constitution of the kingdom of heaven is such, that God has solemnly declared, and this under different dispensations, and more or less plainly in all ages of his church, that no unregenerate person, i. e. no impenitent sinner, shall have any part in it." And I am now further to shew,

2. That "the nature of the future happiness (which is here chiefly signified by the kingdom of God,) is such, that an unregenerate person would be incapable of relishing it, even upon a supposition of his being admitted into it."

This is a thought of so great importance, and so seldom represented in its full strength, that I shall at present confine my discourse entirely to it.

I know, sinners, it will be one of the most difficult things in the world, to bring you to a serious persuasion of this truth. You think heaven is so lovely, and so glorious a place, that if you could possibly get an admittance thither, you should certainly be happy. But I would now set myself, if possible, to convince you, that this is a rash and ill-grounded persuasion; and that on the contrary, if you were now in the regions of glory, and in the society of those blessed inhabitants, that un-

renewed nature, and unsanctified heart of yours, would give you a disrelish for all the sublimest entertainments of that blissful place, and turn heaven itself into a kind of hell to you.

Now for the demonstration of this, it is only necessary for you, seriously to consider "what a kind of happiness that of heaven is, as it is represented to us in the word of God;" for from thence undoubtedly we are to take our notions of it.

You might, to be sure, sit down, and imagine a happiness to yourselves, which would perfectly suit your degenerate taste; a happiness which the more entirely you were enslaved to flesh and sense, the more exquisitely you would be able to enter into it. If God would assign you a region in that beautiful world, where you should dwell in fine houses, magnificently furnished, and gaily adorned; where the most harmonious music should sooth your ear, and delicious food and generous wines, in a rich variety, should regale your taste: If he should give you a splendid retinue of people, to caress and attend you, offering you their humblest services, and acknowledging the most servile dependance upon your favour: Especially, if with all this he should furnish you with a set of companions, just of your own temper and disposition, with whom you might spend what proportion of your time you pleased in gaming and jollity, in riot and debauchery, without any interruption from the reproof, or even the example of the children of God, or from indispositions of body, or remorse of conscience: This you would be ready to call life, and happiness indeed: And if the great disposer of all things were but to add perpetuity to such a situation, you would not envy persons of a more refined taste the heaven you lost, for such a paradise as this.

Such indeed was the happiness which Mahomet promised to his followers: Flowery shades, and gay dresses; luxurious fare, and beautiful women, are described with all the pomp of language, in almost every page of his alcoran, as the glorious and charming rewards, which were to be bestowed on the faithful after the resurrection. And if this were the felicity which the gospel promised, extortioners and idolaters; whoremongers and drunkards, would be much fitter to inherit the *kingdom of God*, than the most pious and mortified saint that ever appeared upon earth. But here, as almost every where else, the bible and the alcoran speak a very different language; and far from leading us into such gross and sensual expectations, our Lord Jesus Christ has told us, that the children of *The resurrection neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are like the*

*angels of God in heaven**, and enjoy such pure and spiritual delights, as are suited to such holy and excellent creatures.

It is true, that in the book of Revelations, stately palaces and shining habits; delicious fruit and harmonious music, are all mentioned, as contributing to the happiness of those, who have the honour to inhabit the New Jerusalem. But then the stile of that obscure and prophetical book naturally leads us, to consider these merely as figurative phrases, which are made use of to express the happiness that divine wisdom and love has prepared for the righteous, in a manner accommodated to the weakness of our conceptions: Or at least, if in any of these respects provision be made for the entertainment of a glorified body, whatever its methods of sensation and perception may be, all will be temperate and regular: And after all, this is even there represented, but as the least considerable part of our happiness, the height of which is made to consist in the most elevated strains of devotion, and in an entire and everlasting devotedness to the service of God and of the Lamb.

Let us therefore immediately proceed to settle the point in question, by a more particular survey of the several branches of the celestial felicity, as represented to us in the word of God: And from thence it will undeniably appear, that were an unregenerate soul in the same place with the blessed, and surrounded with the same external circumstances, the temper of his mind would not by any means allow him to participate of their happiness. For it is plain, the scripture represents the happiness of heaven, as consisting,—in the perfection of our minds in knowledge and holiness;—in the sight and service of the ever-blessed God,—in beholding the glory of our exalted Redeemer;—and enjoying the society of glorious angels and perfect saints,—throughout an endless eternity.—Now, Sinners, it is impossible, you should enter into any such delights as these, while you continue in an unregenerate state.

I. One very considerable part of the happiness of heaven consists, "in that perfection of knowledge and holiness, to which the blessed shall be there exalted;" in which the unregenerate soul can have no pleasure.

Thus we are told, that *The spirits of just* men shall there be *made perfect*†; for *Nothing that defiles*, as every degree of moral imperfection does, *shall enter into the* New Jerusalem‡. An Old Testament saint conceived of future happi-

* Mat. xxii. 30. † Heb. xii. 23. ‡ Rev. xxi. 27.

ness, as consisting in being *Satisfied with the likeness of God*:* A character that is manifestly most agreeable to the view of it, which the *beloved disciple* gives us, where he says, that *When Christ shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is†;* which must certainly refer to the glories of the mind, which are of infinitely greater importance, than the highest imaginable beauty and ornament, that can be put upon the corporeal part of our nature in its most illustrious state.

Now from this perfection of holiness, which shall then be wrought in the soul, there will naturally arise an unspeakable complacency and joy, something resembling that, which the blessed God himself possesses in the survey of the infinite and unspotted rectitude of his own most holy nature. And in proportion to the degree, in which the eyes of our understandings are enlightened to discern wherein true excellency consists, will the soul be delighted in the consciousness of such considerable degrees of it in itself.

But surely it will be superfluous for me to undertake to demonstrate, that an unregenerate soul can have no part in this divine pleasure, which implies the complete renewal of the mind as its very foundation. For to imagine that he might, would be supposing him regenerate, and unregenerate at the same time. As Mr. Baxter very well expresses it, "The happiness of heaven is holiness; and to talk of being happy without it, is as apparent nonsense, as to talk of being well without health, or being saved without salvation.

I would only add on this head, That the highest improvement of our intellectual faculties could not make us happy, without such a change in the affections and the will, as I have before described under the former general head. For the more clear and distinct the knowledge of true excellence and perfection is, the greater would be your anguish and horror to see and feel yourselves entirely destitute of it; and it is exceeding probable, that spirits of the most elevated genius have the keenest sensation of that infamy and misery, which is inseparable from the prevalence of sinful dispositions in such minds as these.

2. Another very considerable branch of the celestial happiness, is that which arises "from the contemplation and enjoyment of the ever-blessed God;" but of this likewise an unregenerate sinner is incapable.

As our own reason assures us, that God is the greatest and

* Psal. xvii. 15. † 1 John iii. 2.

best of beings, and the most deserving object of our enquiries and regards, one would think it would naturally lead us to imagine, that the perfection and happiness of the human soul consists in the knowledge and enjoyment of him; and that when it arrives at the seat of complete felicity, it must intimately know him, and converse with him. And in this view, I have sometimes been surprised, that men of such distinguished abilities, as some of the heathen poets and philosophers appear to have been, should have had no greater regard to the Supreme Being in the descriptions which they give us of the future happiness. That sort of friendship for them, which an acquaintance with their writings must give to a person of any relish for the beauties of composition, makes one almost unwilling to expose the low and despicable ideas, which they often give of the state of their greatest heroes in the regions of immortality.——But the word of God speaks a very different language. Our Lord represents the rewards to be bestowed on the *Pure in heart*, by telling us, that *they shall see*, i. e. contemplate and enjoy *God**: And virtuous souls, who *Overcome* the temptations with which they are here surrounded, shall be *made* as *pillars in the house of their God, and shall go no more out*†: And it is elsewhere said, that *His servants shall serve him, and shall see his face*‡. And David's views under a darker dispensation rose to such a degree of refinement, as to say, *As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness*§; which he mentions as a felicity infinitely superior to all the delights of the most prosperous sinner.

But now, Sinners, it is utterly impossible, that while you continue in an unregenerate state, you should behold the face of God with pleasure. The unutterable delight, which the blessed inhabitants of heaven find in it, arises, not merely from the abstract ideas of his essential perfections, but from a sense of his favour and love to them. It is this that gives a relish to the whole survey, and rejoices the heart of all the saints, both in heaven and on earth. He is a God of awful majesty and irresistible power, of infinite wisdom and unspotted holiness, of unerring justice, invariable fidelity, and inexhaustible goodness; and *This God is our God, he will be our guide and our portion for ever*‖. And were it not for this view, let a creature think of God with ever so much spirit and propriety, he must *think of him, and be troubled*¶; yea, he must be filled with unutterable horror and confusion, as the devil is, at the thought of an in-

*Mat. v. 8. †Rev. iii. 12. ‡Rev. xxii. 3, 4.
§Psal. xvii. 15. ‖Psal. xlviii. 14. lxxiii. 26. ¶Psal. lxxvii. 3.

finitely perfect being, in whom he has no interest, from whom he has nothing friendly to expect; and if nothing friendly, then every thing dreadful.

Now it is certain, Sinners, that while you continue in an unregenerate state, under the influence of that *Carnal mind*, which *is enmity against God**, and full of unconquerable rebellion against his law, there can be no foundation for a friendship between him and your souls; nor for any persuasion, or any apprehension, of your interest in his favour and love. Friendship, you know, supposes something of a similitude of nature and sentiment; for, as God himself argues, how *Can two walk together, except they be agreed*†? Now I have before observed to you at large, that God, being *Of purer eyes than to behold evil*‡, must necessarily *Hate all the workers of iniquity; the foolish* therefore *shall not stand in his sight*§, or shall not be admitted to such a situation: Nor would they indeed be able to endure it.——Let conscience judge, what satisfaction you could find in the presence of a God, that you knew scorned and hated you, even while he suffered you to continue among the crowd of his children and servants. The more lively ideas you had of the beauty and perfection of the divine nature, the more you must loath yourselves, for being so unlike him, and so abominable to him: And what pleasure do you think consistent with such self-contempt and abhorrence? Or rather, would not the wretched degeneracy of your nature lead you another way; and a kind of unconquerable self-love, joined even with this consciousness of deformity and vileness, lead you to hate God himself? It is described as the fatal effect of prevailing wickedness in the heart, *My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me*‖. And thus would it probably work in you, and produce in your wretched breasts a mortal hatred against him, and an envious rage at the thought of his perfect happiness: A state of mind, of all others that can be imagined, the most odious, and the most tormenting. How, Sirs, could your hearts, possessed with these diabolical passions, bear to see the beams of his glory surrounding you on every side? How could you bear to hear the songs and adorations, that were continually addressed to his throne; and to observe the humble attendance of all the hosts of heaven about it, who perpetually reckon it their honour and happiness to be employed in obedience to his commands? Such a sight of the glory and felicity of your divine enemy would make you, so far as your limited nature was capable of it, miserable even in

* Rom. viii. 7. † Amos iii. 3. ‡ Hab. i. 13. § Psal. v. 5. ‖ Zech. xi. 8.

proportion to the degree in which he is happy. This was, no doubt, the torment of the devils, as soon as they had harboured a thought of hostility against God; and the remembrance of that glory in which they once saw him, and which they know he still invariably possesses, is surely an everlasting vexation to them; and it would be so to you, if you were within the sight of it.

But further, the blessed in heaven find their everlasting entertainment "in the service of God." *They rest not day and night, saying, holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty*;* i. e. they are continually employed, either in the immediate acts of devotion, or in other services, in which they still maintain a devotional temper, and are breathing out their souls in holy affections, while their active powers are employed in the execution of his commands. But as I have already shewn you, that while in an unregenerate state you could have no sense of his favour to you; it is very apparent, that you could have no sentiments of gratitude and love towards him. So that while angels and glorified saints were breathing out their souls in the most delightful and rapturous praises, you must keep a sullen kind of silence: Or, if it were possible that your harps and voices should sound as melodiously as theirs, it would be all ceremony and shew; the music of the heart would be wanting; and you would look on all the external forms of service, but as a tedious task, and count it your misfortune that the customs of the place obliged you to attend them. You may the more easily apprehend and believe this, when you consider what little relish you now have for those solemnities of divine worship, in which sincere christians have the most lively foretastes of heaven. You know in your own consciences, that short and interrupted as our public services are, they are the burden of your lives. You know, that you say, in your hearts at least, *When will the sabbath be past, and the new moon be gone†?* Judge then, how insupportable it would be to you, to spend an everlasting sabbath thus. I question not, but to your wretched spirits, annihilation would appear vastly preferable to an eternal existence so employed.

3. Another very considerable branch of the happiness of heaven, is that which arises "from the sight of the glory of an exalted Redeemer;" but for this likewise no unconverted sinner can have any relish.

This is a view of the future happiness, which our Lord

* Rev. iv. 8. † Amos viii. 5.

gives us, when he prays for his people in those memorable words, engraven, as I hope, upon many of our hearts; *Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me**. And he elsewhere promises it, as the great reward he would bestow upon his people; *If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall my servant be*†. And, agreeable to this, the apostle Paul represents it, as the transporting view in which he considered the happiness of the future world; *I desire*, says he, *to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better*‡; incomparably beyond any of the enjoyments of the present world, which can come into competition with it.——But for this part of the happiness of angels, and of *the spirits of just men made perfect*, it is also evident, that you, Sinners, can have no relish.

The sight of Christ will afford holy souls a transporting delight, because they will regard it as the glory of their Redeemer and their friend, and as a pledge and security of their own glory. But what foundation can you, Sinners, find for such a joyful sympathy with Christ, and such a comfortable conclusion with regard to yourselves? Such is the wretched degeneracy of your nature, that though Christ be indeed *The chiefest among ten thousand*, and *altogether lovely*§, being *The brightness of his* Father's *glory and the express image of his Person*‖, possessed of every divine perfection and excellence; yet you now slight and neglect him, and discern in him *No form nor comeliness, for which he is to be desired*¶: And were you unregenerate in heaven, the same principle would prevail. Now where there is no love to a person, there can be no delight in his converse, nor any pleasure in his happiness. Nay, the contrariety of your nature to his, would rather occasion aversion and terror. You could not but know, that the blessed Jesus *Is holy and undefiled, and separate from sinners***; that he abhors all moral evil to such a degree, that he laid aside all the glory and entertainments of heaven, that he might destroy the interest of sin in this world of ours, and might *Purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*††: And when you should recollect at the same time that sinfulness that continued to reign in your hearts, and made you *To every good work reprobate*‡‡, you could not but know, that you must be hateful to him; and therefore could not but fear, lest his almighty power should be

*John xvii. 24. †John xii. 26. ‡Phil. i. 23. §Cant. v. 10, 16. ‖Heb. i. 3.
¶Isa. liii. 2. **Heb. vii. 26. ††Tit. ii. 14. ‡‡Tit. i. 16.

exercised for your punishment and destruction: And thus your terror must rise, in proportion to the sensible evidence you had of his dignity and authority. In a word, you would stand like guilty rebels in the presence-chamber of their injured and displeased Sovereign: His throne and his sceptre; his robe and his crown; his courtiers and his guards, though in themselves splendid and magnificent objects, only serve to terrify and amaze them, while they display the grandeur and power of their enemy.

4. Another very considerable branch of the celestial happiness will be "the society of angels and glorified saints;" but for this likewise an unregenerate sinner must be unfit.

You know, that when the apostle speaks of our alliance to the heavenly world, he represents it as a social state; where excellent spirits dwell together, and converse with each other with mutual esteem and endearment: *Ye are come*, says he, *unto the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect**; It is *Sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, with all the patriarchs and prophets, all the apostles and martyrs, *in the kingdom of heaven*†: And perhaps you think, you shall want nothing more to complete your happiness, than to be admitted to a place among them. But reflect a little more attentively upon the circumstances of things, and I am persuaded you will form a different jndgment.

There is no reason to doubt, but that at your first entrance into the regions of glory, you would be agreeably struck with the view of those inhabitants. As for those beauties of their character, which consist in love to God, and in zeal for his honour and interest, it is certain, that you would be insensible of them, and pay but little regard to them: But the humanity and benevolence of their temper would, no doubt, render them agreeable to you; and so much the more, as self-love might lead you to expect some personal advantage by it. And it is more than possible, that you would be much prejudiced in their favour, by those resplendent and attractive forms in which they appear; forms, no doubt, far more beautiful and engaging, than any which the children of men ever saw upon earth. On both these accounts it might be natural enough for you, at first, to address them with an air of respect, as persons that you could

* Heb. xii. 22, 23. ‡ Mat. viii. 11.

be glad to be upon good terms with, and in whose friendship you could desire a share.

But how do you think, that any such proposal of friendship would be received by an angel, or a glorified saint? No doubt, if there were any prospect of converting you, or any hope you might be brought to a devout and holy temper, they would immediately become preachers of righteousness to you; and endeavour by the most rational, the most pathetic, and the most insinuating address, to awaken and charm you to a sense of religion, and so to form you to a capacity for happiness. But they would know, that according to the eternal constitution of God, there could be no room to entertain such an hope; but that being *Filthy*, you must *be filthy still**: And therefore, as they would know you to be incorrigible, their love to God, and their concern to be approved and accepted by him, would prevent their forming any intimate friendship with persons, whose natures were so contrary to him, and on whom he looked with such irreconcileable abhorrence. And besides this, their own personal sanctity of character would give them an aversion to such corrupt and degenerate creatures: So that how much soever they might pity your condition, they would turn away from you as objects whose presence and converse were not to be endured.

And do not you easily apprehend, that such a refusal on their part would be both shameful, and very provoking to you? For which way could you bear it, to be thus rejected and dishonoured by the most excellent part of creation; by those whom perhaps you once intimately knew, and with whom you conversed upon equal terms; nay, by many, who were once much your inferiors, and whom perhaps, in the pride of your hearts, you would not condescend to regard? The natural effect of this must surely be, that you would soon be proportionably displeased and enraged with the refusal, as you were at first charmed at their appearance: And when you saw that transporting pleasure which they took in the affection and friendship of each other, and the joy which the divine favour poured into their souls, while you, in the very same place, were excluded from these rich entertainments, your hearts would soon burn with envy and indignation; and as much as you before admired them, you upon this would come to hate them. And perhaps that hatred would put you upon some attempt to interrupt, or even, if it were possible, to destroy that happiness, which you

* Rev. xxii. 11.

were not allowed to share. But then, when you saw them continually under the divine protection, and *Compassed with his favour, as with a shield**, so that your malice could not reach them, all the keenness and rancour of your spirit would recoil upon itself; you would fly from their presence, as insupportable; and would be glad to retire to some meaner apartment, or to hide yourselves in the shades of darkness; so that you might but get rid of the sight of so many dazzling objects, whose lustre, instead of cheering your vitiated eye, would pain and overpower it.

But if you should not be transported to this diabolical excess; if it were possible for you to behold the glorified saints, and to live among them, without these envious and tormenting passions; yet surely you would want a relish for the most entertaining part of their conversation. Had you indeed a good natural genius, which to be sure many unconverted sinners have, it might be very agreeable to hear them discoursing of the wonders of nature; and that curiosity, which is, in some measure, incident even to persons of the meanest capacities, would make it pleasant to hear them recount the important history relating to the revolutions of the angelic world, which we on this earth are entirely strangers to, or at least have been very little acquainted with them. But surely, the most delightful topics of conversation, which heaven itself can furnish out, must be those which are religious and divine; the infinite perfections of the ever-blessed God; the personal glories and incomparable love of his condescending, but exalted son; and the sanctifying operations of the blessed Spirit on the soul, transforming it into the divine image, and making it meet for eternal glory. Yea, even when the blessed Spirits above are handling philosophical or historical subjects, they still consider them with a regard to God, as his perfections are displayed, and illustrated in the works of his hands, and in the conduct of his providence. And here their pleasure flows, not merely from a set of rational ideas, which arise in their own minds, or are suggested to them by others; but from the exercise of those devout affections upon the blessed God, which are correspondent to these several subjects of discourse.

And can you, Sirs, who are *Alienated from the divine life*†, and accustomed to live in a continual neglect and forgetfulness of the great parent of universal nature, can you relish such subjects as these? You would, no doubt, be discontented, and

* Psal. v. 12. † Ephes. iv. 18.

uneasy in such a scene: The heavenly oratory of this holy society, would have no charms for you; but you would be longing for some of those vain and worthless companions, which you were so fond of here upon earth, to hear a merry story, or a song, or to join with them in the pleasures of a debauch.

5. Another considerable branch of the happiness of heaven arises "from the assured prospect of the everlasting continuance of this felicity;" but, if an unregenerate soul could find any entertainment at all in heaven, he certainly could have no ground for such an expectation of its continuance.

When the children of God on earth think of the happiness of heaven, the eternity of it makes a very deep impression on their hearts, and even swallows up their souls with ardent desire, and unutterable joy: It raises their esteem, and animates their hope, while they reflect on that *Exceeding and eternal weight of glory**, that *House not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*†, and that *Inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and which fadeth not away*‡.——And no doubt, but the blessed in heaven regard it in the same view, and all the pleasures they enjoy are vastly increased by the prospect of their endless duration; so that by the anticipation of an eternity still to come, they do, as it were, every moment enjoy an infinite satisfaction. But as for you, Sinners, while you are so ill attempered to the happiness of heaven, the prospect of an eternal abode there, would not, on the principles I have laid down above, be a prospect of eternal happiness, but rather, on the whole, of eternal uneasiness to you.

But suffer me a little to discourse upon another supposition; and let me now, for argument sake, wave what I have been so long insisting upon, and suppose that you could so far command the turbulent passions of your own heart, and so unite, as it were, the whole powers of your soul, to attend to the beauty of place, the harmony of music, and whatever else may be supposed capable of regaling the senses or the imagination; as upon the whole to find heaven a pleasing and delightful abode, and to wish, that though some of its entertainments were above your taste and capacity, yet, you might be allowed an eternal enjoyment of the rest: Could there be any room for you to expect a perpetual abode in these blissful seats? No, Sinners, you would not be able so much as to hope it. The good itself is so great, and perpetual enjoyment, even in any degree, has

* 2 Cor. iv. 17. † 2 Cor. v. 1. ‡ 1 Pet. i. 4.

such a kind of infinite value, that I know not how the purest and noblest spirits in heaven could absolutely have been secure of it, separate from the engagement of a divine promise. And what divine promise would you be able to have recourse to, in such a circumstance as we now suppose? Where could you find it in all the book of God, that persons of your character should ever enter into heaven at all, much less that you should for ever continue there?—You could have therefore no security of the continuance of your abode in heaven, if it were possible that you should enter on the possession of it: But when you should consider the unsullied holiness of the ever-blessed God, the Sovereign of this sacred province, and the spotless purity of that gracious Redeemer, to whom the government of it is committed; you could not but fear that you should quickly be seized by the hand of vengeance, be hurled from the battlements of heaven, and plunged low into the pit of destruction. You know this was the condemnation of the rebel angels, and your guilt, compared with that dreadful event, which makes so considerable a scene of the history of heaven, would, I doubt not, be sufficient to create everlasting jealousy and uneasiness, and to turn every pleasurable circumstance into a source of horror, in the apprehensions of being deprived eternally of it.

Thus you see, Sirs, from a particular survey of the various lights in which heaven is represented, and of the various branches of which its happiness consists, an unregenerate sinner is incapable of it, even though we should suppose, that he was actually admitted to it. Let me entreat you to reflect on all these things, and you will see the reasonableness of that one remark, with which I shall conclude my discourse.

How vain are all those hopes of heaven, which in your present condition you are ready to entertain!

I have been proving at large, that if God were to admit you to the possession of heaven, which it is certain that he never will, you would be incapable of relishing the enjoyments of it: Nay, that there would be a solid foundation in your own hearts, for many of the most tumultuous and disquieting passions. Envy and grief, fear and rage, those roots of bitterness, would spring up even in the paradise of God, and turn the fertility of that blessed soil into their own nourishment. And do you imagine, that any external accommodations or ornaments, could make you easy and comfortable, under the transports of such hellish passions? What if you were to take a man that was tormented with a violent fit of the stone or gout, and to place him

in a most delicious garden, or in a palace of marble and cedar, to set him on a throne of gold under a canopy of purple, to clothe him with robes of velvet and embroidery, regaling him with the most delicious fruits and generous wines, and at the same time soothing his ear with all the harmony of sound, which the most melodious symphony of instruments and voices could afford? Would all this magnificence and luxury make him insensible of that anguish which was racking his very vitals? Or would not that inward torture rather render him insensible of this association of pleasurable impressions from without? Yea, would it not incline him to suspect, that you intended all these pompous preparations, only to deride and insult him? As little would your distempered and unholy souls be capable of relishing the entertainments of heaven, while these entertainments, and these souls of yours continue what they are at present.

There must be therefore a change: And will you consider where that change must be made? If you continue still in your present character and circumstances, there must be a vast change in heaven itself, before you can be happy in it. The whole temper, character, and disposition of every saint and angel there, must be changed from what it now is, before they can be capable of any friendly and complacential conversation with you. Yea, our Lord *Jesus Christ* who is *the same yesterday, to day, and for ever**, must divest himself of those beauties of holiness, which are infinitely dearer to him than any external grandeur or authority, before he can receive you into his kingdom. Nay, *The* very *Father of lights, with whom* there *is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*†, must be entirely changed: He must lay aside that holiness, which is essential to his nature, and which is the brightness and glory of it; he must love that which he now hates, and be indifferent to that which he most affectionately loves, before he can open his arms to you, and smile upon your souls. And can you dare to hope for such an unaccountable, such an inconceivable revolution as this? No, Sirs, infinitely sooner would God change earth into hell, and bury you, and all of your character, under the ruins of this world, which you inhabit and pollute, than he would thus tarnish the beauties of heaven, and divest himself of the brightest glory of his own divinity. "God," says Archbishop Tillotson, "has condescended to take our nature upon him, that he might make us capable of happi-

* Heb. xiii. 8. † Jam. i. 17.

ness; but if this will not do, he will not put off his own nature to make us happy."

What then do you imagine? Do you think, that God will prepare some separate apartments of heaven, furnished with a variety of sensual pleasure, for the entertainment of persons of your character? Some apartments, from whence the tokens of his presence shall be withdrawn, from whence the exercise of his worship shall be banished, from whence saints and angels shall retire to make way for those inhabitants, who, like you, have sinned themselves beyond a capacity of enjoying God, or of being fit companions for any of his most excellent creatures? This were to suppose the christian religion false, and to contradict the light of natural reason too, which not only shews such a disposition of things to be unworthy the divine sanctity and Majesty, but also shews, that if there be a future state, it must be a state of misery to wicked men, in whose minds those vicious habits prevail, which are even now the beginning of hell; which therefore they must carry along with them wherever they are, in proportion to the degree in which they are predominant.

Upon the whole then, you must evidently see, that it is absolutely necessary, that you, Sinners should be changed, if ever you expect to have any part or lot in the future happiness. And when do you expect that change should be wrought? Do you expect it, when death has done its dreadful office upon you, and your soul arrives at the invisible world? Is the air of it, if I may be allowed the expression, so refined, that it will immediately purify, and transform, every polluted sinner that comes into it? You cannot but know, that the whole tenor of scripture forbids that presumptuous destructive hope. It assures us, that *There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave**; but that we must be judged, *According to what we have done in the body*, and not according to what has past in any separate state, *whether* the actions we have done be *good, or* whether they be *evil*†.

If ever therefore you are regenerate at all, it must be while you are here below, in this state of education and trial: And if you continue in your sins till death surprise you, your souls will be for ever sealed up under an irreversible sentence, and by the decree of God, and the constitution of things, will be excluded from happiness, as by no means either entitled to it, or prepared for it. So evident is the truth of this assertion in

* Eccl. ix. 10. † 2 Cor. v. 10.

the text, that *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

And will you then sit down contentedly under such a conclusion as this, "I shall be excluded from this kingdom, as accursed, and profane?" Alas, Sirs, the conclusion is big with unutterable terror and death; as I should now proceed to shew you at large, if my time would allow: For I am next to represent the infinite importance of *entering into* that *kingdom*, and consequently of that entire change which has been proved to be necessary to that entrance. But I must reserve that to the next opportunity of this kind. In the mean time let me add, that I doubt not, but there are many present, who have heard this description of the heavenly world with delight, and who are saying in their hearts, "*This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it**: This is the felicity, to which my heart aspires with the most ardent breathing." Such may with the utmost reason regard it as a token for good, and may go on in a cheerful assurance, that the grace that has *Made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*†, will at length conduct them to it, in perfect safety, and everlasting triumph. Amen.

* Psal. cxxxii. 14. † Col. i. 12.

SERMON VI.

ON REGENERATION.

Of the Importance of entering into the Kingdom of Heaven.

John iii. 3.——*Except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.*

HOW impossible it is, that an unregenerate sinner should *see*, i. e. enjoy *the kingdom of God*, or that future blessedness to which the gospel is intended to lead its professors, I have shewn you at large. I have appealed to the testimony of God's holy prophets, and apostles, in concurrence with that of his incarnate Son, to prove that persons of such a character are, by the inviolable constitution of that kingdom, excluded from it. And I have farther, in my last discourse, proved that if they were actually admitted to it, they would be incapable of relishing its pleasure; that their vitiated palate would have a distaste to the choicest fruits of the paradise of God; yea, that in these blissful regions thorns and briars would spring up in their paths, and make them wretched in the very seat of happiness.

I doubt not, but you are in your consciences generally convinced, that the truth of these things cannot be contested. You are inwardly persuaded, that it is indeed so; and I fear, many of you have also reason to apprehend, that you are of this unhappy number, who are hitherto strangers to regenerating grace. But how are your minds impressed with this apprehension? Do I wrong you, Sirs, when I suspect, that some of them are hardly impressed at all? Do I wrong you, when I suspect, there are those of you, who have spent the last week with very little reflection upon what you have heard? The cares and amusements of life have been pursued as before, and you have not taken one hour to enter into the thought with self-application, and seriously to consider, "I am one of those, concerning whom eternal wisdom and truth has pronounced, that, if they continue such as at present they are, they *shall not see the kingdom of God.*" You have not paused at all upon the awful thought; you have not offered one lively petition to God, to

beg that you may be recovered from this unhappy state, and brought to a meetness for his kingdom, and a title to it. For your sakes therefore, and for the sakes of others in your state, having already explained, illustrated, and confirmed the proposition in my text, I proceed,

III. To represent to you the importance of the argument suggested here; or to shew you, how much every unregenerate sinner ought to be alarmed to hear, that while he continues in his present state, *he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

And oh! that while I endeavour to illustrate this, my *Words* might enter into your minds as *goads*, and might fix there *as nails fastened in a sure place!* The substance of my argument is *Given* forth *by the one* great *Shepherd**; may the prosecution of it be blessed, as the means of reducing some wandering sheep into his fold;

Now in order to illustrate the force of this argument I beseech you seriously to consider,——what this kingdom is, from which you are in danger of being for ever excluded;——and what will be the condition of all those, who shall be finally cut off from any interest in it.

[1.] Consider, "what that kingdom is, from which the unregenerate, or those who are not born again, shall be excluded."

And here you are not to expect a complete representation of it: For that is an attempt, in which the tongues of angels, as well as men, might fail; or how proper soever their language might be in itself, to us it would be unintelligible; for *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him* †. And surely these final and most illustrious preparations of his love must, beyond all others, exceed our description and conception. A minister that with the apostle Paul, had been *Caught up into the third heaven*, if he would attempt to speak of the glorious scenes which were there opened to him, must say, they were *unutterable things*‡: And one, that with John, had laid in the bosom of Christ himself, must say, as that apostle did, *It does not yet appear what we shall be* §. And indeed, when we go about to discourse of it, I doubt not, but the blessed angels pity the weakness of our apprehensions and expressions,

* Eccles. xii. 11. Isa. xxii. 23. † 1 Cor. ii. 9. ‡ 2 Cor. xii. 2, 4. § 1 John iii. 2.

and know that we do but debase the subject, when we attempt the most to exalt and adorn it.

Yet there are just and striking representations of this kingdom made in the word of God; and we are there often told, in general, wherein it shall consist. You no doubt remember, that I was, in the last of those lectures, going over several important views of it. I then told you, it will consist, in the perfection of our souls in knowledge and holiness; in the sight of God, and our blessed Redeemer; in exercising the most delightful affections towards them, and in being for ever employed in rendering them the most honourable services; in conversing with saints and glorious angels; and in the assured expectation of the eternal continuance of this blessedness in all its branches. That this is the scriptural representation of the matter, I proved to you from many express testimonies in the word of God: And, I doubt not, but you have often heard the excellency of each of these views represented at large, in distinct discourses on each.

I will not therefore now repeat what has been said upon such occasions; but will rather direct you to some general considerations, which may convince you of the excellency of that state and world, from which, if you continue unregenerate, you must for ever be excluded: For I would fain fix it upon your minds, that it is in this connection, and for this purpose, that the representation is made. And oh! that you might so review it, as no longer to *Neglect so great salvation**, nor act as if you *Judged* such *everlasting life* to be beneath your attention, and *unworthy* your care and regard †! You cannot think it so, when you consider,—that it is represented in scripture under the most magnificent images;—that it is the state, which God has prepared for the display of his glory, and the entertainment of his most favourite creatures;—that it is the great purchase of the blood of his eternal Son;—that it is the main work of his sacred Spirit to prepare men's hearts for it;—and the great business of our inveterate enemy the devil, by all possible means, to prevent our obtaining it.—Each of these considerations may much illustrate the excellency of it, and all taken together yield a most convincing demonstration.

1. Consider, "by what a variety of beautiful and magnificent images this happiness is represented in the word of God;" and that may convince you of its excellency.

When the blessed God himself would raise our conceptions

* Heb. ii. 3. † Acts xiii. 46.

of a state of being, so much superior to any thing we have ever seen or known, unless he intended a personal and miraculous revelation of it, he must borrow our language, and in painting the glory of heaven must take his colours from earth. And here the magnificence of a city, the sweetness of a garden the solemn pomp of a temple, the lustre of a crown, and the dignity of a kingdom, strike powerfully on the human mind, and fill it with veneration and delight. But when such figures as these are borrowed from this low world of ours, faintly to shadow out that which is above, there is always the addition of some important circumstance, to intimate how far the celestial original exceeds the brightest earthly glory, by which the divine condescension has vouchsafed to describe it.

The enumeration of a variety of scriptural descriptions will set these remarks in the strongest light.—If therefore heaven be described as a city, it is *The New Jerusalem, the city of our God, that cometh down from God out of heaven**: The pavement of its *Streets* is all *of pure gold*, its *gates* are *pearl, and* its *foundation jewels*†.—If it be a garden, it is *The Paradise of God*‡, and so far superior to that which he at first prepared and furnished out for the entertainment of Adam in his state of innocence, that it is planted on every *Side* with *the tree of life*§; of which there was but one alone in the garden of Eden; and is watered, not with such common rivers as the Tigris and Euphrates, but with that living, copious, inexhausted stream, the *River of the water of life*, which *proceeds from the throne of God*‖, and gently glides along through all its borders. —When it is represented as a temple, we are told, that instead of a golden ark placed in the remotest recess, to which only the high-priest might once a year approach, and on which he might not be allowed to gaze, *The throne of God* is erected there¶, perpetually surrounded with myriads of worshippers, who *See his face, and*, like the high-priest, when clothed in his richest robes, *have his name* written *in their foreheads***: Instead of the feeble rays of that golden candlestick, whose lamps shone in the holy place, the heavenly temple is illuminated in a more glorious manner, and *Needs no candle, neither light of the sun, for the glory of God* continually *enlightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof*††: Nay, we are assured, that its sacred ministers are *Made kings* as well as *priests unto God*‡‡; and,

* Rev. iii. 12. xxi. 2.
† Rev. xxi. 19, 21.
‡ Rev. ii. 7.
§ Rev. xxii. 2.
‖ Rev. xxii. 1.
¶ Rev. vii. 15.
** Rev. xxii. 4.
†† Rev. xxi. 23. xxii. 5.
‡‡ Rev. i. 6.

accordingly, being *Clothed in white raiment, they have crowns of gold on their heads**; as well as *Harps and golden vials*, or censors, *full of incense*, in their hands†: And lest we should think, these pompous services are only the entertainment of some peculiarly sacred seasons, we are told that *They rest not day nor night*‡, adoring him that sits upon the throne, and are fixed, as *Pillars in* his *temple, to go out no more* §.—Again, if it be spoken of as a crown it is represented as *incorruptible*‖; *A crown of glory that fadeth not away*¶.—And when it is called a kingdom, the scripture does not only add, as here in the text, that it is *the kingdom of God*, which must certainly exalt the idea of it; but that it is *A kingdom which cannot be moved* **, an *Everlasting kingdom*††: Nay, to carry our thoughts to the highest degree of dignity and glory, it is spoken of as a *Sitting down with* Christ *on his throne*‡‡.

But further, the value of these illustrious representations is much enhanced, if we consider the character of the persons by whom they are made. They were persons well acquainted with these things, having received their information from a divine Revelation, and from the immediate visions of God. They were also persons of such sublime and elevated sentiments, that they had a sovereign contempt for all the enjoyments of time and sense, even those which the generality of mankind set the greatest value upon; and *Counted all things but loss for the knowledge of Christ* §§, and *The testimony of* a good *conscience*‖‖, while they *Looked not at temporal*, but at *eternal things*¶¶. They could deliberately, constantly, and even cheerfully, resign all the riches, and honours, and carnal pleasures, which they might have purchased by their apostacy from religion; and were ready to embrace bonds, imprisonments, or death itself, when it met them in the way of their duty.—Now certainly a glory, with which such holy, wise, and heroic persons were so passionately enamoured, and which they describe with such pathos of language, and such extacy of delight, while they were trampling with so generous a disdain on every thing which earth calls good and great, must deserve our very attentive regard. And this it will more evidently appear to do, if we consider,

2. "It is the state and world, which God has prepared for the display of his glory, and the entertainment of the most favoured of his creatures."

* Rev. iv. 4. † Rev. v. 8. ‡ Rev. iv. 8. § Rev. iii. 12.
‖ 1 Cor. ix. 25. ¶ 1 Pet. v. 4. ** Heb. xii. 28. †† 2 Pet. i. 11.
‡‡ Rev. iii. 21. §§ Phil. iii. 8. ‖‖ 2 Cor. i. 12. ¶¶ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

This argument seems to be hinted at, when it is said (as in the place I referred to before) *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him* *. God well knows the capacity of his creatures, and how much happiness they are able and fit to receive; and he can fill their capacities to the utmost; nay, he can farther enlarge them to what degree he pleases, that they may admit superior degrees of glory and felicity. A happiness therefore which he has prepared on purpose to display the riches of his magnificence and love, and to shew what he can do to delight his creatures, must certainly be in some measure proportionable, if I may so express it, to the infinity of his own sacred perfections. Let us then seriously consider, who God is; and attentively dwell, in our meditation, on the extent of his power, and the riches of his bounty; and our conception of the happiness of heaven must be raised to something more glorious, than the most emphatical words can perfectly describe.

And here, to assist our imagination in some degree, let us look round us, and take a survey of this visible world. This earth, how conveniently has he furnished it, how beautifully has he disposed it, how richly has he adorned it! What various and abundant provision has he made for the subsistence, the accommodation, and the entertainment of creatures that inhabit it! and especially of man, in whom this scheme and system of things appears to centre, and to whom it is all most wisely and graciously referred! Yet earth is the habitation of a race of mean and degenerate creatures, who are but in a state of trial; nay, it is the habitation of thousands and ten thousands of God's incorrigible enemies, with whom he *Is angry every day*†. Already it is marked with some awful characters of the divine displeasure; and the scripture assures us, that it is *Reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men*‡. Yet even this earth is not a spectacle unworthy our regard; nor can we, if we allow ourselves to survey it with becoming attention, behold it without an affecting mixture of admiration, of love, and of joy: Passions, that will strike us yet more powerfully, if from this earth of ours we raise our eyes to the visible heavens; and there behold the glory of the sun, the brightness of the moon, and all the numerous hosts of heaven that attend in her train. Who that considers, with any

* 1 Cor. ii. 9. † Psal. vii. 11. ‡ 2 Pet. iii. 7.

degree of attention, their magnitude, their lustre, their motion, and their influence, can forbear crying out, *Oh Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy glory above the heavens**! And when, with even these in our view, we further reflect, that there is another apartment, as yet invisible, of which the spangled firmament is but as it were, the shining vail; an apartment, where the great Creator and Governor of all has fixed his stated residence, and erected the throne of his glory; even that throne, which is for ever surrounded by all the most holy and excellent of his creatures; we must be convinced, it is something more beautiful, and more magnificent than this harmonious system itself. And methinks when we have said more beautiful and more magnificent than this, imagination is ready to fail us, and to leave the mind dazzled and overwhelmed with an effulgence of lustre, which it cannot delineate, and can scarce sustain. Yet will our venerable apprehensions of it be farther assisted, if we consider,

3. That the *kingdom of heaven* is "the great purchase of the blood of God's *only begotten Son;*" and therefore to be sure it must be inconceivably valuable.

If you are at all acquainted with your bibles, you must know, that we are by sin in a state of *Alienation from God*†; that we had forfeited all our title to his love, and stood justly exposed to his severe displeasure; and that it is *Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come*‡. Now if we owe it to his merit and atonement *That we live*§, much more are we to ascribe it to him, if we are raised to any superior degree of happiness. If God could not, with honour to his justice, have suffered us, without such a propitiation, to have passed off with impunity; much less could he, without it, have received us to his embraces, and have advanced us *To sit with him on his throne*‖. Accordingly it is said of the blessed martyrs, in the heavenly world, even of those, who had so gloriously distinguished their fidelity and zeal, and *Loved not their lives unto the death*¶; that they had *Washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb***: And they gratefully acknowledge it in their hymns of praise, that Christ *had redeemed them to God by his blood, and had made them kings and priests unto God*††.

Now let us seriously reflect, and consider, what this *Blood of the Lamb* is. The apostle Peter tells us, that *silver and gold,*

* Psal. viii. 1. † Ephes. iv. 18. ‡ 1 Thess. i. 10. § 1 John iv. 9.
‖ Rev. iii. 21. ¶ Rev. xii. 11. ** Rev. vii. 14. †† Rev. v. 9, 10.

and all the peculiar treasures of kings and princes, are but *corruptible things**, or perishing and worthless trifles, when compared with it. And no wonder, it is represented in such exalted language, when we consider it was the blood of *the only begotten Son of God*, who is *The brightness of his* Father's *glory, and the express image of his person*†, and indeed, one with him‡, being possessed of a nature truly and properly divine, so that it is called *The blood of God*§. We may well argue, even from these transient surveys, that it was some important happiness, which he came to procure at so expensive a rate. Had an angel been sent down from heaven, we should naturally have concluded, it must have been upon some momentous errand: Surely then, when the Lord of angels comes down, not only to live on earth, but to expire in bitter agonies on the cross, to purchase a benefit for us, we may be well assured, that this benefit must be very considerable. Our Lord Jesus Christ must certainly set a very great value upon it, or he would not have purchased it at such a price: And we are sure, the value that he apprehended in it, must be its true value. He could not be imposed upon by any false appearance of glory and splendor: He despised with a just and generous contempt *All the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them*‖: And he was also well acquainted with the celestial kingdom, having so long dwelt in it, and so long presided over it: Yet so highly does he esteem it, that he speaks of it upon all occasions, as the highest possible gift of divine bounty, the richest preparation, and noblest contrivance of divine love: Yea, he regards it as a felicity so great, that, when he conducts his people into it, with the last solemn pomp of the judgment-day, it is said, *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied*¶, allowing it to be a just equivalent for all he has done, and all he has suffered in so glorious a cause.

4. The excellency of the heavenly kingdom will farther appear, if we consider, that "it is the main work of *the Spirit of God* upon men's hearts, to prepare them for an admittance into it."

You well know, that the blessed *Spirit of God* is spoken of as that divine agent, by whom all *the hosts of heaven were created*, and all God's various works produced**; and it is he, that *Knows the things of God*, even as *the human spirit knows the*

* 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. † Heb. i. 3. ‡ John x. 30. § Acts xx. 28.
‖ Mat. iv. 8, 10. ¶ Isa. liii. 11. ** Job xxxiii. 4. Psal. xxxiii. 6.

*things of a man**. Now it is his peculiar office in the economy of our redemption, to form the soul to a meetness for glory. Accordingly when the apostle Paul had been reminding the Corinthians that, while they continued in their sinful state, they were unfit for the *Kingdom of God;* he adds, *But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*†.

That the Spirit should condescend to engage at all in such a work, must give us a very sublime idea of the end at which it aims. But much more will that idea be raised, when we consider with what a variety, and what a constancy of operations he begins, continues, and perfects it. He attempts it, as we shall hereafter more particularly shew you, sometimes by convictions of terror, and sometimes by insinuations of love; and by one method or another, in the hearts of all the heirs of this glory, he works so great a change, that it is represented by turning a *Heart of stone into a heart of flesh*‡, by *raising the dead from their graves*§, yea, by producing a *New creation*‖. For this does he watch over the soul with the tenderest care, and continues his friendly offices, to recover it from relapses, and gradually to form it to advancing degrees of sanctity, till at length it be enabled to *Perfect holiness in the fear of God*¶. Nay, so intent is this sacred agent on the important work, that when sinners most insolently and ungratefully reject him, and by resisting him oppose their own happiness, he does not immediately leave them; he strikes them again and again; and waits upon them for succeeding days, and months, and years: And when perhaps the sincere convert makes the most ungrateful return for the experience of his goodness, even after he has acknowledged, and at length obeyed it; when, under the fatal transport of some ungoverned passion, and the influence of some strong temptation, he acts as if he were intent upon tearing down the work of the Spirit of God upon his soul, and driving him for ever away; yet in how many instances does he return again after all these injuries, pleading the cause of God with a sweetly prevailing eloquence, and thus healing the wound, and repairing the breach, and making it perhaps stronger than before? And all this, for what? That the happy subject of all these kind operations may be formed to a fitness for *the kingdom of heaven.*——And are we to regard this blessed Spirit as an unmeaning agent, or as incapable of judging of the importance of

* 1 Cor. ii. 11. † 1 Cor. vi. 11. ‡ Ezek. xxxvi. 26.
§ Ezek. xxxvii. 13. Eph. ii. 5, 6. ‖ 2 Cor. v. 17. Eph. ii. 10. ¶ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

this end for which he acts? Is that almighty energy of his employed in an insignificant manner? Surely Nicodemus, slow of understanding as he was, must apprehend the importance of *entering into the kingdom of heaven*, when he heard, that in order to be admitted to it, a man must be born of the Spirit. And let me add once more,

5. That the excellency of the heavenly kingdom may further be argued "from the eagerness with which the enemy of souls is endeavouring to prevent our entrance into it.

You know, the devil is always represented as the inveterate enemy of our happiness. His rage is expressed by that of *A roaring lion*, that *walks about, seeking whom he may devour*;* and with unwearied diligence he is continually employed in forming and pursuing his temptations: And this is the grand design of all, that he may exclude us from the promised felicity. While sinners are in their unregenerate state, he endeavours to engage all their regards to the objects of time and sense; and for that purpose he continually presents them with a variety of entertainments and amusements suited to their respective tempers and circumstances. If they are awakened to any serious concern about their eternal salvation, he uses his utmost address to divert their minds from an attendance to it. And for this purpose he displays before them all the allurements of sin in its most engaging forms; and if they are not captivated with these, he often puts on a face of terror, and endeavours to affright them from religion by the most gloomy representations of it, or by horrible and distracting suggestions, "that it is now for ever too late to attain it." Or if divine grace surmount all this opposition, and the sinner resolutely chuses his portion in heaven, and puts his soul into the hands of Christ to be conducted to it; the malice of Satan pursues him even to that sacred retreat, which he has sought in the arms of his Saviour: And if he cannot prevent the soul from entering into heaven, he will at least labour to bring it into such a state of negligence, and to seduce it into those delays and relapses, which may divert its regards to that blessed world, which may cloud its evidences of it, and may, at least as much as possible, diminish the degree of its glory there.

Now permit me, in this instance, to turn the artillery of this cunning enemy against himself, and to argue the excellency of this kingdom, from the zeal and attachment with which he

* 1 Pet. v. 8.

endeavours to obstruct your attaining it. Though Satan be now a very degenerate creature, he was once an angel of light, and still retains much of the knowledge, though he has lost the rectitude and integrity, of the angelic nature. And he particularly knows what heaven is, because he was once an inhabitant there; and while he is endeavouring to persuade the sinner to prefer earth before it, he does, by that very endeavour incontestably prove, that he himself knows the contrary, and is fully apprised that there is nothing here to be compared with the felicity of the future state. And therefore while he seeks the destruction of the soul, he can leave it in the enjoyment of all its worldly prosperity; nay, he will attempt to lead him into methods, by which this prosperity may be promoted and increased.

And thus, Sirs, I have endeavoured a little to represent to you, what this kingdom of heaven is, from which we are assured that unconverted sinners shall for ever be excluded. I have argued its excellency,——from the representations which are made of it in the word of God,——from its being the preparation of divine love,——from its being the purchase of a Redeemer's blood,——and the end, to which, on the one hand, the glorious operations of the blessed Spirit lead,——and of which, on the other hand, all the stratagems and assaults of the prince of darkness are intended to deprive us.—If therefore there be truth in scripture, if there be wisdom in heaven, or policy in hell, it must surely be infinitely important. And will any of you be such mean-spirited creatures, as, when this happiness is proposed to you, basely to relinquish the pursuit of it, and to sacrifice this blessed hope to any perishing trifle of mortal life. Surely it would be madness; though nothing more were to be apprehended than the loss of it; and though when heaven were lost, all earth can give should remain, if not to counterbalance the loss, yet at least to make you less sensible of it. But the weight of the argument will much more evidently appear, if you consider,

[2.] What will at last become of all those who are excluded from this heavenly kingdom.

And here, I beseech you to ask your own consciences, whether they be not inwardly persuaded,—that those who are excluded from heaven, will remain in a state of existence, in which they will be ever sensible of their loss,—and will be delivered over by divine vengeance into that seat of torment, which God has prepared for the punishment of his implacable and incorrigible enemies.—This many of you do undoubtedly

believe of such persons in general: Believe it therefore of yourselves, if you are, and continue, in an unregenerate state.

1. "You will still continue in a state of existence, in which you will be ever sensible of your loss."

It might afford some wretched kind of consolation to you, if, as soon as you died out of this world, your being, or your apprehensive powers were immediately to cease. Then the loss of heaven would only be an affliction to you in your dying moments, when you saw the enjoyments of earth were come to an end, and that you must have no part in any future happiness. But alas, Sirs, you cannot but know, that when your bodies are dead, and consumed in their graves, your thinking faculties will still be continued to you: And oh, that you would seriously reflect, how they will then be employed! You will then be thinking what you have done in life, what you have chose for your happiness, and what has been the consequence of that choice. You will look round in vain for such accommodations and pleasures, as you were once most fond of: But they will be no more; and when you perceive them vanished, like the visionary amusements of a dream, you will lift up your astonished eyes towards the regions of glory. And you indeed will have a lively view of them: But to what purpose will that view serve? Only, through the righteous vengeance of God, to aggravate your misery and despair. "Alas," will you think, "there are millions of creatures yonder in heaven, who are rejoicing in the sight and favour of God, and are as full of happiness as their natures can contain, and shall be so for ever; while I am cut off from all share in the divine bounty. Rivers of pleasure are flowing in upon them, while not one drop is sent down to me; nor could I obtain it, though I were to ask the favour, from the least of Christ's servants there. I am cast out as an accursed wretch, with whom God, and his holy and blessed creatures will have no farther intercourse, or communion: And why am I thus cast out? and why am I thus cut off from God's favour, and driven from his presence, while so many that dwelt with me on earth, are admitted to it? My nature was originally as capable of happiness as theirs; and though it was sadly degenerate, it might, like theirs, have been renewed. God was once offering me that grace, by which my disordered soul might have been transformed, and I might have been fitted for the regions of glory: But I despised all these offers, and gave the preference to those fading vanities, which, alas! have for ever forsaken me. And now *They that were ready are gone in* to

the delightful banquet, *and the door is shut** ; the everlasting gates are shut for ever, and barred against me. And here I must lie at this miserable distance, envying and raging at their happiness, of which, whatever sight or knowledge I may have of it, I must never, never, never partake."

Such reflections as these, Sirs, will cut deep into your souls ; and accordingly our Lord declares to impenitent sinners in his own days, *There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see* others sitting down *in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out†*. And if you would reflect, you might easily apprehend this. How would you be enraged at yourselves, if by your folly you had neglected securing a plentiful estate, when it was offered to you on the most easy terms ; and you actually saw others, once your equals, and perhaps your inferiors, in the possession of it, in consequence of having taken those methods which you stupidly neglected ? The reflection I doubt not, would very much impair the pleasure you might find in other comfortable and agreeable circumstances. How much more insupportable then will the loss of heaven appear to you, when you come to see, and know, what it is you have lost, and have nothing to relieve, or support you, under the painful recollection ?

It is to no purpose to object, that upon the principles of my last discourse, there will be no room to lament your exclusion from those entertainments, which you would be incapable of relishing, if you were admitted to them : For you will then see and lament that incapacity, as a very great misery. As if a man who was naturally fond of feasting and mirth, should see a great many regaling themselves, and revelling about him, while he was languishing under some painful distemper, which made him incapable of joining in the entertainment ; he would yet grieve, that he had no part in it ; And it would be the increase, rather than the alleviation of his uneasiness, that it was his sickness which unfitted him for it ; especially if, as in your case, it was a sickness, which he had brought upon himself by his own folly, and for which he had been offered an easy, pleasant, and infallible remedy, which he had refused to use, till the malady was grown utterly incurable. One would imagine, this thought would be enough to impress you ; but if you do not, let me intreat, and even charge you to consider,

* Mat. xxv. 10. † Luke xiii. 28.

2. That if you are excluded from the *kingdom of heaven*, "you will be consigned over to those regions of darkness, despair, and misery, which God has prepared for those unhappy criminals, who are the objects of his final displeasure, and whom he will render everlasting monuments of his wrath."

There is something in human nature, that starts back at the thought of annihilation with strong reluctance: And yet how many thousands are there in this miserable world, who would with all their souls fly to it as a refuge? They *Shall seek death*, as an inspired writer strongly expresses it, *and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them**. I will not attempt to enter into a detail of the horrors, attending the place and state, into which all who are excluded from the glories of the heavenly world shall be cast, and in which they shall be fixed. Let that one awful scripture suffice for a specimen of many more; in which we are told, that every one whose name *Was not found written in the book of life*, or who was not registered in the number of those, who were to inhabit the New Jerusalem, or the *kingdom of heaven, was cast into the lake of fire*†, or, as it is afterwards expressed, *Into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone*‡. Think of this, and ask your own hearts, you that are so impatient of the little evils of mortal life, whether you can endure to take up your abode for ever in *Devouring fire*, or whether you can *dwell with everlasting burnings*§? Yet these are the images, by which the word of God represents it; to be plunged as in a sea of liquid fire, whose flames are exasperated and heightened, by being fed with brimstone; nay, as the prophet speaks, by a copious *stream of brimstone*, so expressly appointed by God himself, that this, as well as *the river of the water of life*, is represented as proceeding immediately from him: *He has made Tophet deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it*‖.

It is painful to a tender mind to think of this, as what its fellow-creatures are obnoxious to: It is grievous to speak of it, in these dreadful terms. But who are we, that we should be more merciful than God? Or rather, how can we imagine it is mercy, to avoid speaking of the appointment of infinite wisdom, for the punishment of impenitent sinners? What mercy were

* Rev. ix. 6. † Rev. xx. 15. ‡ Rev. xxi. 8. § Isa. xxxiii. 14. ‖ Isa. xxx. 33.

that, Sirs, to avoid to mention these terrors to you, and to neglect to warn you of them, because they are great? which is indeed the very reason, why the scripture thus pathetically describes them.

Away therefore with this foolish, this treacherous compassion, which chuses rather to leave men to be consumed, than to disturb their slumbers! Think, Sirs, of that wretched glutton, whom Christ describes as *Lifting up his eyes in hell, being in torments;* seeing the regions of the blessed at an unapproachable distance, and begging in vain that *one drop of water* might be sent to *cool his tongue*, amidst all the raging thirst with which he was *tormented in this flame**. Regard it attentively; for as God lives, and as your soul lives, if you continue in an unrenewed state, you see in that wretch the very image and representation of yourselves. Yes, Sinners, I testify it to you this day, that intolerable as it seems, it will, on that supposition, be your own certain fate: or to speak much more properly, your righteous, but inevitable doom. Heaven and earth will desert you in that dreadful hour: Or, if the inhabitants of both were to join to intercede for you, it would be in vain. Sentence will be past, and execution done: Hell will open its mouth to receive you, and shut it again for ever to inclose you with thousands, and ten thousands more, among whom you will not find one to comfort you, but every one ready to afflict you. Then shall you know the value which God sets upon his heavenly kingdom, by the judgments he inflicts upon you for neglecting and despising it; and then shall you know the importance of being *born again*, that only means by which hell can be avoided, and heaven secured.

And let me farther add, that conviction will quickly come in this terrible way, if you are not now prevailed upon to consider these things; things, which if you have the least regard to the word of God, you cannot but notionally believe. Do not then go about to annihilate, as it were, these prospects to your mind, by placing them at a long distance. The distance is not so great, as to deserve a mention: The patience of God will not wait upon you for thousands, or even hundreds of years: You have a few mortal days, in which to consider of the matter; or rather, you have the present moment to consider of it. And if you improve the opportunity, it is well; but if not, the just and uniform methods of the divine administration shall proceed,

* Luke xvi. 23, 24.

though it should be to your ruin. God has vindicated the honours of his violated law, and despised gospel, upon millions, who, with the rebel *Angels*, by whom they have been seduced, are even now *reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day**: and he will as surely vindicate them upon you. *If you do not repent*, if you are not regenerate, *you shall all likewise perish*†, and not one of you shall escape.

And thus I close this copious and important argument; this argument in which life and death, salvation and damnation are concerned. View it, my friends, in all its connection, and see in what part of it the chain can be broken. Will you say, that without regeneration you can secure an interest in the *kingdom of heaven*, though the constitution of heaven oppose it, and all the declarations of God's word stand directly against it; and though nature itself reclaim, and conscience testify your incapacity to enjoy it? Or will you say, that being excluded from it, you shall suffer no considerable damage, though you lose so glorious a state, the noblest preparation of divine love, the purchase of redeeming blood, and the end of the Spirit's operation on the soul; though you ever remain sensible of your loss, and be consigned over to dwell in that flaming prison, which God has prepared for the Devil and his angels, and where all the terrors of his righteous judgments are made known.

But if you are indeed inwardly convinced of the truth and importance of these things, and will go away, and act as before, without any regard to them, I can say no more. The reason of man, and the word of God can point out no stronger arguments, than an infinite good on the one hand, and an infinite evil on the other.

Hear therefore, Oh heavens, and give ear, Oh earth! and let angels and devils join their astonishment; that creatures, who would strenuously contend, and warmly exert themselves, I will not say merely for an earthly kingdom, but in an affair where only a few pounds, or perhaps a few shillings or pence were concerned, are indifferent here, where, by their own confession, a happy or miserable eternity is in question: For indifferent, I fear, some of you are, and will continue. I have represented these things in the integrity of my heart, as in the sight of God, not in artful forms of speech, but in the

* Jude ver. 6. † Luke xiii. 3.

genuine language, which the strong emotions of my own soul, in the views of them, most naturally dictated. Yet I think it not at all probable, that some of you, and some perhaps who do not now imagine it, will, as soon as you return home, divert your thoughts and discourses to other objects; and may perhaps, as heretofore, lie down upon your beds without spending one quarter of an hour, or even one serious minute, in lamenting your miserable state before God, and seeking that help and deliverance which his grace alone can give. But if you thus lie down, make, if you can, *A covenant with death*, that it may not break in upon your slumbers; *and an agreement with hell**, that before the return of the morning, it may not flash in upon your careless souls another kind of conviction, than they will now receive from the voice of reason and the word of God.

* Isa. xxviii. 15.

SERMON VII.

ON REGENERATION.

Of the Necessity of the divine Influences to produce Regeneration in the Soul.

Titus iii. 5, 6.——*Not by Works of Righteousness, which we have done, but according to his Mercy he saved us, by the Washing of Regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*

IF my business were to explain and illustrate this scripture at large, it would yield an ample field for accurate criticism, and useful discourse, and more especially would lead us into a variety of practical remarks, on which it would be pleasant to dilate in our meditations. It evidently implies, "that those who are the saved of the Lord, are brought to the practice of good works;" without which *Faith is dead* *, and all pretences to a saving change are not only vain, but insolent. Yet it plainly testifies to us, "that our salvation, and acceptance with God, is not to be ascribed to these, but to the divine *mercy*; which mercy operates by sanctifying our hearts, through the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit:" And, "that there is an abundant effusion of this Spirit under the gospel," which is therefore with great propriety called *The ministration of the Spirit*†, and *The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*‡.

But I must necessarily in pursuance of my general scheme, wave several of these remarks, that I may leave myself room to insist on the grand topic I intend from the words.

I have already shewn you, who may be said to be in an unregenerate state: I have also described the change, which regeneration makes in the soul: And have largely shewn you in the three last discourses, the absolute necessity and importance of it. And I now proceed,

Fourthly, To shew the necessity there is, of the agency of the divine power, in order to produce this great and important change.

* James ii. 17. † 2 Cor. iii. 8. ‡ Rom. viii. 2.

This is strongly implied in the words of the text; in which the apostle, speaking of the method God has been pleased to take for the display of his goodness in the salvation and happiness of fallen men, gives us this affecting view of it, that it is *not by works of righteousness, which we*, i. e. any of us christians, *have done, but according to his* free grace and *mercy* that *he* has *saved us, by the washing*, or (as might be rendered) the laver, *of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.*

I shall be ready to acknowledge, with the generality of ancient and modern interpreters, that baptism may probably here be called the laver of regeneration; God having appointed, that as new-born children are washed, so they, who by the influences of his grace on their hearts are born again, should in token of their repentance for the sins of their past life, be washed with baptismal water, supposing, (which was here apparently the case, in this early age of christianity,) they had not received that ordinance in their infancy. Nevertheless, lest any should imagine that an external ceremony was sufficient, or that it was the chief thing intended, the apostle takes the matter higher. And as the apostle Peter tells us, that the *Baptism* which *saves us*, is *not* merely *the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God*;* so the apostle Paul here adds, that we are *saved by the renewing of the Holy Ghost:* By which I can by no means understand something entirely distinct from, and subsequent to, his regenerating influences; for according to the view of regeneration stated in our former discourses, none can be regenerated, who are not renewed: But it seems to explain the former clause, and to refer to the more positive effect produced by divine grace on the soul, whereby christians are not only purified from sin, but disposed to, and quickened in, a course of holy obedience. And then he further tells us, that this spirit is the gift of God, and is plentifully communicated to us in the name, and through the hands, of the blessed Redeemer, *being shed on us abundantly by God, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*

Agreeably therefore to the general design and purport of these words, I shall go on to demonstrate the absolute necessity of a divine agency and operation in this great work of our regeneration; which I shall do from a variety of topics. And here I shall studiously wave many controversies, with which

* 1 Pet. iii. 21.

the christian world has been afflicted, and the soundest part of it disturbed, with relation to the kind and manner of this influence. I will not so much as mention them, and much less discuss them; *Lest Satan should take an advantage of us**, to divert our minds from what is essential in this doctrine, to what is merely circumstantial. Only let it be observed in general, that I speak of "such an agency of God on our minds, as offers no violence to the rational and active nature which God has given us, nor does by any means supersede our obligations to those duties which his word requires; but on the contrary, cures and perfects our nature, and disposes the soul to a regard to such incumbent duties, and strengthens it in the discharge of them." With this only preliminary, which appears to me highly important, I proceed to shew the reasonableness of ascribing this change to a divine agency, rather than to any thing else which may be supposed to have any share in producing it. And we may infer this,

[1.] "From the general and necessary dependance of the whole created world upon God."

There was a philosophical, as well as divine truth, in that observation of the apostle Paul at Athens, which was well worthy the most learned assembly; In him, i. e. *In God we live, and move, and have our being*†. Such is the innate weakness of created nature, that it continually depends on a divine support. The very idea of its being created supposes, that it had no cause of its existence, but the divine will, in the first moment of it: And if it could not then subsist without that will, in the first moment of its existence, it neither could subsist without in the second, or in any future moment of it: Since to have been dependent for a while, can never be supposed to render any thing for the future independent. The continued existence then of all the creatures, no less of angels, than of worms, or trees, or stones, does properly depend upon the divine energy, which bears them up, and holds those of them in life, which live, and those of them in being, which are inanimate or without life.

And if their being be dependent, then surely it will follow, that all their perceptive and active powers, whatsoever they are, must continually depend upon God: For to exist with such powers is evidently more, than simply to exist; and if a

* 2 Cor. ii. 11. † Acts xvii. 28.

divine agency be necessary for the latter, much more must we allow it to be necessary for the former.

The human mind therefore, with all its capacities and improvements, must acknowledge itself perpetually indebted to God, who is the fountain of truth and wisdom, as well as of being: Accordingly we are told, it is *He, that teacheth man knowledge**. All the skill of the husbandman†, in one passage of scripture, and all the *wisdom* of the artificer‡, in another, is ascribed to his influence: And if the improvement of the sciences, and any other discovery, which renders human life in any degree more commodious and agreeable, is to be ascribed to the divine illumination and influence, then surely it is from hence this art of living wisely and well must also be derived. All the views upon which good resolutions are formed, all the strong impressions upon the mind arising from these views, and all the steadiness and determination of spirit, which does not only form such purposes, but carries them into execution, are plainly the effect of the divine agency on the mind; without which no secular affairs could be clearly understood, strenuously pursued, or successfully accomplished. And how peculiarly reasonable it is, to apply this remark to the point now in view, will appear by attending,

[2.] To "the greatness and excellency of this change," which speaks it aloud to be the divine work.

I must upon this occasion desire you to recollect what I laid before you in several of the former discourses. Think of the new light that breaks in upon the understanding,——of the new affections that are enkindled in the heart,—of the new resolutions, by which the will is sweetly and powerfully, though most freely influenced;—and think of the degree of vigour attending these resolutions, and introducing a series of new labours and pursuits;—and surely you must confess, that it is *the finger of God*: Especially when you consider,—how beautiful and excellent, as well as how great the work is.

Do we acknowledge, that it was the voice of *God* that first *commanded the light to shine out of darkness*§, and that it was worthy of a divine agency to produce so beautiful a creature as the Sun, to gild the whole face of our world, and to dress the different objects around us in such a various and vivid assemblage of colours? And shall we not allow it to be much more worthy of him, to lighten up a benighted soul, and to

* Psal. xciv. 10. † Isa. xxviii. 26. ‡ Exod. xxxvi. 1, 2. § 2 Cor. iv. 6.

reduce its chaos into harmony and order?—Was it worthy of God, to form the first principles even of the vegetative life, in the lowest plant or herb, and to visit with the refreshing influences of the rain and sun, the earth wherein these seeds are sown? And is it not much more worthy of him, to implant the seed of the divine life, and to nourish it from time to time by the influence of his Spirit?—Did it suit the divine wisdom and mercy, to provide for sustaining our mortal lives, for healing our wounds, and recovering us from our diseases? And shall it not much more suit him, to act as the great physician of souls, in restoring them to ease, to health and vigour?

They must be dead indeed to all sense of spiritual excellency, who do not see how much more illustriously God appears, when considered as the author of grace, than merely as the author of nature. For indeed all the works of nature, and all the instances of divine interposition to maintain its order and harmony, will chiefly appear valuable and important, when considered in subserviency to the gracious design of recovering apostate man from the ruin of that degenerate state, without which it had been far better for him never to have known being, and never to have inhabited a world so liberally furnished with a variety of good. And therefore I would appeal to every christian, whether he does not find a much more ardent gratitude glowing in his heart, when he considers God as the author of the religious and divine, than merely of the animal or the rational life.

And permit me here to remark, that agreeably to these reasonings, some of the pagan philosophers have said very serious and remarkable things, concerning the reality, and the need, of divine influences on the mind, for the production of virtue and piety there. Thus Seneca, when he is speaking of a resemblance to the Deity in character, ascribes it to the influence of God upon the minds: "Are you surprised," says he, "that man should approach to the Gods? It is God that comes to men; nay, which is yet more, he enters into them: For no mind becomes virtuous, but by his assistance*." Simplicius also was so sensible of the necessity of such an influence, that he "prays to God, as the Father and guide of reason, so to co-operate with us, as to purge us from all carnal and brutish affections, that we may be enabled to act according to the dictates of reason, and to attain to the true knowledge of

* Miraris Hominem ad Deos ire? Deus ad Homines venit, imò (quod prius est) *in Homines* venit: Nulla sine Deo Mens bona est. He had said but just before, Ascendentibus manum porrigunt. Senec. Epistol. lxxiii.

himself*." And Maximus Tyrius argues, agreeably to what was said above, that "if skill in the professions and sciences is insinuated into men's minds by a divine influence, we can much less imagine, that a thing so much more excellent as virtue is, can be the work of any mortal art; for strange must be the notion that we have of God, to think that he is liberal and free in matters of less moment, and sparing in the greatest†." And in the same discourse he tells us, "that even the best disposed minds, as they are seated in the midst between the highest virtue and extreme wickedness, need the assistance and the help of God, to incline and lead them to the better side‡."——I am sensible, that all these philosophers, with many more who speak to the same purpose, living after Christ's time, may be said to have learnt such language from christians; and if they did so, I wish all who have since worn the name, had been equally teachable: But some who appeared much earlier, speak much in the same manner§, as I might easily shew you, if it were not already more than time to observe,

* Ικετευω σε, Δεσποτα, ο πατηρ και ηγεμων τȣ εν ημιν λογȣ,—— συμπραξαι ως αυτοκινητοις ημιν προς τε καθαρσιν την απο τȣ σωματος και των αλογων παθων, κτλ. Simplic. in Epictet. ad fin.

† Ειτα εκεινα μεν ηγῃ θειᾳ τινι επιπνοια ψυχαις ανθρωπιναις ανακρινασθαι, το δε τȣτων σπανιωτερον την αρετην εργον ειναι τεχνης θνητης· η πολλȣ αξιον νομιζεις το θειον, προς μεν τα φαυλα καλως και αφθονως παρεσκευασμενον, προς δε τα κρειττω απορον. Max. Tyr. Dissert. xxii.

‡ Αι αρισται ψυχης φυσεις, αμφισβητισιμοι εν μετριω της ακρας αρετης, προς την εσχατην μοχθηραν καθωρμισμεναι δεονται ξυναγωνιστȣ Θεȣ και ξυλληπτορος της επι θατερα τα κρειττω ροπης και χειραγωγιας. Max. Tyr. ibid.

§ It is here remarkable, that *Xenophon* represents *Cyrus* with his dying breath "as humbly ascribing it to a divine influence on his mind, that he had been taught to acknowledge the care of providence, and to bear his prosperity with a becoming moderation:" Πολλη δε υμιν χαρις, οτι καγω εγιγνωσκον την υμετεραν επιμελειαν, και ȣδε πωποτε επι ταις ευτυχιαις υπερ ανθρωπον εφρωνησα. Xen. Cyropæd. lib. viii. cap. 7. §. 1. And *Socrates* is introduced by *Plato*, as declaring, "that wheresoever virtue comes, it is apparently the fruit of a divine dispensation;" Θεια μοιρᾳ ημιν φαινεται παραγιγνομενη ῃ αρετη, οις παραγιγνεται. Plat. Men. ad fin. p. 428. And to this purpose *Plato* has observed, "that virtue is not to be taught, but by divine assistance;" Αλλ' ȣδ' αν διδαξειεν, ει μη Θεος υφηγοιτο. Epinom. page 1014. And elsewhere he declares, that if any man escape the temptations of life, and behave himself as becomes a worthy member of society, as the laws of it are generally settled," which by the way is something very far short of religion, "he has reason to own that it is God that saves him;" Ευ γαρ χρη ειδηναι, ο τι περ αν σωθη τε και γενηται οιον δει, τοιαυτῃ καταστασει πολιτειων Θεȣ μοιραν αυτο σωσαι. D. Repub. lib. vi. pag. 677. Edit. Francof. 1602.

[3.] That we may further argue the divine agency in this blessed work, "from the violent opposition over which it prevails in its rise and progress."

The awakened soul, when labouring towards God, and aspiring after further communications of his grace to form it for his service, may justly say with David, *Lord how are they increased that trouble me?* How *many are they that rise up against me* ?* With how many threatening dangers are we continually surrounded? and what a numerous host of enemies are ready to oppose us? *The law of sin that wars in our members†*, and concerning whose forces it may well be said, *Their name is legion, for they are many‡:* The evil influence of a degenerate world, whose corrupt examples press like a torrent and require the most vigorous efforts to bear up against them: And in confederacy with these, and at the head of all, the prince of darkness, whose counsels and efforts, with relation to this world of ours, do as it were centre in this one thing, to prevent men's regeneration; because it is by means of this, that those are *Recovered out of the snare of the devil, who were* before *led captive by him at his will* §.

I persuade myself, that when I am speaking on this head, though some may imagine it to be mere empty harangue, and a common-place of declamation, the experienced soul will attest the truth of what I say. It may be, some of you, who, by what of these sermons you have already heard, have come under some serious convictions, and been awakened in good earnest to be thoughtful about being *born again*, have felt such a struggle in your own minds, that you may say, You never knew before what the flesh, the world, and the devil were, nor could have imagined, that their opposition to this work was so forcible and violent, as you now find it.——To reform the irregularities of the life, is comparatively easy; but to root sin out of the soul, to consecrate the whole heart to God, and demolish those idols that have been set up, as it were, in the secret *Chambers of imagery* ‖, is difficult indeed: All the corruptions of the heart in such a case are ready to exert themselves, and it is natural for the lusts of the flesh to unite against that which is set upon destroying them all; nor did you ever know before, that there was such a world of sin within you.—With violence also does the *Strong man armed* exert himself, when *his goods* are about to be *taken from him* by one *stronger than himself;* as our

* Psal. iii. 1. †Rom. vii. 23. ‡Mark v. 9. §2 Tim. ii. 26. ‖Ezek. viii. 12.

Lord with an unerring propriety and wisdom represents it*: And indeed it seems, as if through the violence of his malignity, and the righteous judgment of God, who, whenever he pleases, can *Take the wise in his own craftiness*†, that Satan sometimes overshoots his mark, and raises so sensible an opposition, against the cause of God in the soul, that an argument might be drawn, even from that very opposition, to prove the truth and excellency of what he sets himself so directly against.—And you have now perhaps experienced too, more than you ever did before, the inveterate opposition of the seed of the serpent, to that of the woman: You have found, that since you began to think of religion in good earnest, some have derided you, others it may be have reviled you, and enemies have sprung up out of your *Own house*‡; though the impressions you have felt tend to make you more amiable, more kind, and more useful, and therefore one would think should conciliate their friendship: But this is a memorable instance in which self-love seems to make, as it were, a sacrifice of itself to the hatred of God.—Now therefore to accomplish such a mighty change in the midst of such opposition, must evidently speak a divine interposition. And surely the christian, when thus recovered and restored, has reason to declare, as Israel did, *If it had not been the Lord, who was on our side when* these confederate enemies *rose up against us; then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul; then the proud waters had gone over our soul*§, and would have quenched and buried every spark that looked like divine life, and have borne away every purpose of reformation and holiness. The remark will be further illustrated, if we consider,

[4.] "By what feeble means this change is accomplished."

The apostle observes, that in his day *They had the treasure* of the gospel lodged *in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power*, which rendered it successful, *might* appear to *be of God, and not of man*‖. And it is still in a great measure apparent, that the same method is made use of from the same principle. *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal;* and if at any time they are *mighty* and effectual, it must be only *through God* ¶. It is *Not by* secular *might or power***, that this great work is accomplished: No, nor by the refinements of learning, or the

* Luke xi. 21, 22. † 1 Cor. iii. 19. ‡ Mat. x. 36. § Psal. cxxiv. 1—5.
‖ 2 Cor. iv. 7. ¶ 2 Cor. x. 4. ** Zech. iv. 6.

charms of eloquence. These things indeed have their use; the understanding may sometimes be convinced by the one, and the affections moved by the other: Yet where both these have been done, the work often drops short; and it may be the plainest addresses, from a weak and almost trembling tongue, shall perform that which the far superior talents of many have not been able to affect. A multitude of such instances have been found, and perhaps seldom in these latter ages more observable, than in the compass of our own observation.

Now whenever this work is accomplished by the preaching of the gospel in a christian country, there is generally some circumstance that shews it is a divine, and not an human work. It is not the novelty of the doctrine which strikes; for all the main truths, on which the conviction and impression turns, have been known even from early infancy. No miracles awaken the attention, no new discoveries astonish the mind: But what has a thousand times been heard, and as often neglected, breaks in upon the mind with an almost irresistible energy, and strikes it as if it never had been heard of before. They seem, as it were, *When the Lord turneth again their captivity*, to awaken out of a *dream**, and wonder at the accident that has awakened them. The *ministry of the word* may seem but feeble when compared to such an event: and yet sometimes even less solemn methods than that shall be effectual. One single text of scripture accidentally occurring to the sight or thought, one serious hint dropped in conversation, shall strike the mind, and pierce it through with an energy that plainly shews that from whatever feeble hand it might seem to come, it was shot out of the quiver of God, and intended by him that made the heart to reach it: Since there is almost as much disproportion between the cause and the effect, as between Moses *lifting up his rod, and* the *dividing* of the water *of the sea* before *Israel*†. In many instances, remarkable providences, which one would have thought should have struck the soul as it were to the centre, have produced no effect; and yet a word, or a thought, has accomplished it: *And after the whirlwind, the earthquake*, and *the fire*, have made their successive efforts in vain, it has appeared that *the Lord* has been *in the still small voice*‡. On the whole, a variety of circumstances may illustrate the matter in different degrees; but taking it in a general view, the remark appears to be well founded, "that the weakness of the means by which the saving change is wrought, argues plainly that the hand of God is in it;" as when

* Psal. cxxvi. 1. † Exod. xiv. 16. ‡ 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

Anointing the eyes with spittle gave sight to the blind*, it was evidently the exertion of a miraculous power.—But now, agreeably to what has been advanced under these several heads, I shall proceed to shew at large,

[5.] "That the scripture teaches us to ascribe this great change on the mind to a divine agency and operation."

And here you will see that it does not merely drop here and there an expression which is capable of such an interpretation; but that the whole tenor of the word of God leads to such a conclusion; and surely, if we own the word to be divine, we need no more convincing argument of the truth of this remark. The only difficulty I shall here find, will be like that which occurred under the former head, and proceeds from the variety and multiplicity of texts which offer themselves to me, while reflecting on this subject: However, I will endeavour to rank them in the plainest and best order I can, under the following particulars,—We find God sometimes promises to produce such a change in men's minds;—and at other times he speaks of it as his own work, when it has been already produced:—The scripture represents even the increase of piety in a regenerate heart, as the effect of a divine power, and how much more must the first implanting of it be so;—Nay, it goes yet further than this, and expresses the necessity, as well as the reality, of a divine influence on the mind to make it truly religious, and resolves the want of true religion into this, that God withholds his influence.—If therefore any one, and much more if all these particulars can be made out, I think it must force a conviction on your judgments at least, that what we are endeavouring to confirm in this discourse is the doctrine of scripture.

1. There are various places in scripture, wherein God promises to produce such a change in men's minds as we have before described;" which plainly shews that it is to be acknowledged as his work.

Thus Moses says to Israel, without all doubt by the divine direction, *The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live*†. And this circumcision of the heart must surely be the removal of some insensibility and pollution adhering to it, and bringing it to a more orderly, regular, obedient state: Which, as it is sometimes made

* John ix. 6. † Deut. xxx. 6.

matter of exhortation, and thus indeed proves that there is a view in which it may be considered as a duty incumbent upon us (as when Moses said, *Circumcise the fore-skin of your heart**; and Jeremiah, in imitation of him, *Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the fore-skin of your heart*†;) so here it is put in the form of a promise, to signify that wherever it was done, it was in consequence of God's preventing and assisting grace.——On the same principle, the Father promises to Christ, *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power*‡: And if any pretend that these words may possibly admit of another version, though I know none more just than this, there are many other parallel places which are not attended with any ambiguity at all.——Such, in particular, is that gracious promise, which, though it was immediately *Made to the house of Israel*, is nevertheless quoted by the apostles as expressive of God's gospel covenant with all believers; *After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*§: Or as it is elsewhere expressed by the same prophet Jeremiah, *I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever; and I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me*‖.—And Ezekiel echoes back the same language by the same Spirit; *I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them*¶; which is afterwards repeated again almost in the same words; *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh; and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them***.—Now such a transformation of the heart and spirit as may be represented by a thorough renovation, or by changing stone into flesh, speaks the doctrine I am asserting in as plain terms as we could contrive or express, and beautifully points out at once the greatness and excellency of the change, and the almighty power by which it is effected; for we may assure ourselves God would never promise such influences, if he did not really mean to impart them. But again,

* Deut. x. 16. † Jer. iv. 4. ‡ Psal. cx. 3. § Jer. xxxi. 33. Heb. viii. 10.
‖ Jer. xxxii. 39, 40. ¶ Ezek. xi. 19, 20. ** Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

2. Agreeably to the tenor of these promises, the scripture also ascribes this work to a divine agency, when it is affected."

Thus the apostle John, when he is speaking of those who on receiving Christ become the sons of God, declares concerning them that they *Were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God**; plainly intimating that it was to him, and not only or chiefly to themselves or others, that this happy change was to be ascribed; which is well explained by those words of St. James, in which he says, *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures*†. Accordingly our Lord, as you have heard at large, insists upon it as absolutely necessary to a man's *Entering into the kingdom of God*, not only that he should *be born again*, but more particularly that he should *be born of the spirit*‡, i. e. by the sanctifying influence of the spirit of God operating upon his soul, to purify and cleanse it.—And as this great work of regeneration chiefly consists in being brought to faith and repentance, you may observe, that each of these are spoken of as a divine production in the mind, or as the gift of God to it. Thus the believing Jews, with one consent, expressed their conviction when they heard the story of Cornelius, and declare, *Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*§. And so the apostle Paul expresses it, when speaking of the possibility that some might be *Recovered out of the snare of the devil*, he says, *If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth*‖. That very attention to the gospel, which is the first step towards the production of faith in the soul, is resolved into this, when it is said, that *The Lord opened Lydia's heart, that she attended to the things which were spoken by Paul*¶. And with regard to the progress of it, it is not only said in general, *You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins*, but *faith* expressly declared to be *the gift of God***; and the apostle says to the Philippians, that it was *Given to them to believe*††: Nay, it is represented as a most glorious and illustrious effort of divine power, and ascribed to *The exceeding greatness of his power towards them that believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead*‡‡.—And in this view it is, that this change is called a new creation§§: plainly implying, as

*John i. 13. †Jam. i. 18. ‡John iii. 3, 5. §Acts xi. 18.
‖2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. ¶Acts xvi. 14. **Ephes. ii. 1, 8. ††Phil. i. 29.
‡‡Eph. i. 19, 20. §§2 Cor. v. 17.

a celebrated writer well expresses it, "that something must here be done in us, and for us, which cannot be done by us." Wherefore it is said, that *The new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him**; and *We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works†*: Not to insist upon the great variety of parallel passages in which the same thoughts are expressed almost in the very same words. But he indeed who would reckon up all the scriptures, both in the Old and New Testament, which directly or indirectly refer to this, must transcribe a larger part of both than would be convenient to read at one time in a worshipping assembly.—But we may further, by a very strong consequence, infer the doctrine I am now maintaining from those various passages of the sacred writers, in which,

3. "The increase of piety, in an heart already regenerated, is spoken of as the work of God."

Thus David, even when he felt himself disposed to the most vigorous prosecution of religion, solemnly declares his dependance upon continued divine influences to enable him to execute the holy purpose he was then most affectionately forming: *I will run the way of thy commandments*, says he, *when thou shalt enlarge my heart‡*, or when thou shalt influence it with a steady principle of zeal, and with those devout passions which may make every branch of my duty easy and delightful. And the apostle Paul declares his persuasion that God would continue those gracious influences which he had already imparted: *He that has begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ§*. And when he speaks of the ardent desire with which christians were aspiring towards a better world, he adds, *He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing, is God‖*. Thus also he ascribes his continued fidelity in the ministry to the grace of God that was with him, *As* being *one that had obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful¶*; And *By the grace of God*, says he, *I am what I am*; and if *I have laboured more abundantly than* others, it is *not I, but the grace of God which was with me***: On the same principle he acknowledges, that the success of *Apollos* in *watering*, as well as his own in *planting*, was to be referred to this, that *God gave the increase*, in the one case as well as the other††. And he concludes his

* Col. iii. 10. † Eph. ii. 10. ‡ Psal. cxix. 32. § Phil. i. 6.
‖ 2 Cor. v. 5. ¶ 1 Cor. vii. 25. ** 1 Cor. xv. 10. †† 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

epistle to the Hebrews with this remarkable prayer; *The God of peace make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ**.——But indeed, as every prayer that the apostles offer for any of their christian brethren and friends, that they may *grow in grace*, might be urged for the illustration of this head, I choose rather to refer the rest to your own observation on this general hint, than to enter into a more particular enumeration. I shall only add, to complete the argument,

4. That the scripture often declares "the necessity as well as the reality of such influences, and refers the ruin of man to this circumstance, that God, in his righteous judgment, had withheld or withdrawn them."

When Moses would upbraid the obstinacy of the Israelites, that all the profusion of wonders wrought for them in Egypt and in the wilderness had not produced any suitable impressions; so much was he accustomed to think of every thing good, in the moral, as well as in the natural world, as *the gift of God*, that he uses this remarkable expression: *Yet the Lord hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day*†.—And our Lord, the propriety of whose expressions surely none can arraign, speaks to the same purpose, when adoring the divine conduct with respect to the dispensation of saving light and of gospel blessings, he says, *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight*‡. If some of the plainest and lowest of the people, who were in comparison to others but as little children, understood and received the gospel, while the learned men and politicians of the age despised it, God revealed it to the former, while he suffered the veil of prejudice to remain on the mind of the latter, though his almighty hand could easily have removed it.—Those other words of our Lord must not be omitted here, in which he says, *No man can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him*§; And what this *drawing of the Father* means, he himself has explained by saying, *No man can come unto me, except it be given him of my Father*‖; and elsewhere he expresses it by *Learning of the Father*¶; all which must undoubtedly signify a divine agency and influence on the

* Heb. xiii. 20, 21. † Deut. xxix. 4. ‡ Matt. xi. 25, 26.
§ John vi. 44. ‖ Ver. 65. ¶ Ver. 45.

mind.—Nay, a more forcible expression than this, is made use of by the Evangelist, where he takes notice of the unbelief of those that saw the miracles of Christ, *Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said, he has blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts* :* Which is agreeable to that expression of the apostle Paul, *He has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth† :* A thought which the apostle pursues at large through the following verses.

These, to be sure, are very emphatical scriptures : And though it is necessary to understand them in such a qualified sense as to make them consistent with other scriptures, which charge men's destruction, not on any necessitating decree of God, but upon themselves, and the abuse of their own faculties ; yet still these expressions must stand for something ; and in the most moderate sense that can be put upon them, they directly confirm what I have here brought them to prove. So that on the whole, the matter must come to this, " That the cause of men's final and everlasting ruin may be referred, in one view of it, to God's withholding those gracious influences, which if they had been imparted, would indeed have subdued the greatest perverseness : But his withholding these influences is not merely an arbitrary act, but the just punishment of men's wickedness, and of their obstinate folly in trifling with the means of his grace, and grieving his Spirit till it was provoked to withdraw." This thought, which I might largely prove to you to be a compendium of the scripture scheme, reconciles all ; and any consequences drawn from one part of that scheme to the denial of the other, how plausible soever, must certainly be false.

I hope what I have here said may be sufficient to fix a conviction in your judgments and consciences, " that regeneration is ultimately to be referred to a divine influence upon the soul ;" or, as the apostle expresses it in the text, that *God saves us of his mercy, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*

I shall conclude with two or three reflections, which though so exceeding obvious, I shall touch upon, in regard to their great importance, without offering, as I might, to dilate on each of them at large.

[1.] Let those who have experienced this divine change in their souls give God the glory of it.

* John xii. 39, 40. † Rom. ix. 18.

Perhaps there are many of you who may see peculiar reason to do it; perhaps you may be conscious to yourselves, that the arm of the Lord was remarkably revealed in conquering every sensible opposition, and getting itself the victory, even when you seemed as if you had been resolutely bent upon your own destruction, to struggle to the utmost against the operation of his grace on your soul. Others may perhaps have perceived the strength of the divine agency in the slightness of the occasion, or in the weakness of the means by which he wrought; which indeed is often matter of astonishment to those that seriously reflect upon it. But whatever your inclinations may have appeared, and whatever means or instruments were used, give God the glory of all.

If you have found yourselves from your early years inclined to attend to divine things, and susceptible of tender impressions from them, that attention and those impressions were to be resolved into this, that God prevented you with the blessings of his goodness. If you have enjoyed the most excellent public ordinances, even with all the concurrent advantages that the most pressing exhortations, and the most edifying example of parents, ministers, and companions could give; it was divine providence that furnished you with those advantages, and divine grace that added efficacy to them, else they had only served to display their own weakness, even where they might have appeared most powerful, and to illustrate that insensibility or obstinacy of heart which would have rendered you proof against all. You do well indeed to honour those whom God has blessed as the means of your spiritual edification: But if they think aright, it would grieve them to the very heart to have those applauses given, and those acknowledgments made to them, which are due to God alone. All they have done is so little that it deserves not the mention; and the greater attainments they have made in religion, the more cordially will they join with the holy apostle in saying, *Neither is he that planteth, any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase**.

[2.] We may further infer, that they who attempt the conversion of sinners, should do it with a humble dependance on the co-operation of divine grace.

Otherwise they will probably find themselves fatally disappointed; and after their most skilful or most laborious attempts, they will complain that they *Have laboured in vain*,

* 1 Cor. iii. 7.

*and spent their strength for nought** ; and find reason to say, *The bellows are burnt, and the lead is consumed of the fire*, yet the dross is not *taken away*†. A dependance upon God in all the common affairs of life becomes us, as we are creatures ; and it is most necessary that we should *In all our ways acknowledge him*, as we expect or desire that *he should direct* or prosper *our paths*‡. But the greater the undertaking is, the more solemn should the acknowledgment of God be.

Let me therefore especially recommend this to those who are coming forth as young officers in the army of Christ. See to it, my brethren, that *In the name of your God, you set up your banners*§; that you apply from time to time to your public work with a deep conviction upon your minds that no strength of reason will effectually convince, that no eloquence will effectually persuade, unless he that made men's hearts will plead his own cause, and bow those hearts in humble subjection. With these views, I have often known the feeblest attempts successful, and the meek and lowly have *Out of weakness been made strong*‖; while, for want of this, all the charms of composition and delivery have been at best but like the *Lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice*, or the art of one *that can play well on an instrument*¶. It is *Those that honour God* by the most cordial dependance upon him that *he delights to honour***: And I will presume to say, that it is the inward conviction of this important truth, which I feel upon my soul while I am confirming it you, that encourages me to hope, that this *Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord*††, but that a divine blessing shall evidently attend what has already been delivered, and what shall further be spoke. Only let me conclude my present discourse with this one necessary caution,

[3.] That you do not abuse this doctrine of the necessity of divine influences, which from the word of God has been so abundantly confirmed.

God does indeed act upon us in order to produce this happy change; but he acts upon us in a manner suitable to our rational nature, and not as if we were mere machines. He saves us, as the scripture expresses it, by awaking us to *save ourselves*‡‡: *A new heart does he give us, and a new spirit does he put within us*§§, to stir us up to be solicitous to *make ourselves a new heart and a new spirit*‖‖: He *Circumcises our heart to love him*¶¶, by engaging us to *take away the foreskin of our hearts****. You see

* Isai. xlix. 4. † Jer. vi. 29. ‡ Prov. iii. 6. § Psal. xx. 5. ‖ Heb. xi. 34. ¶ Ezek. xxxiii. 32. ** 1 Sam. ii. 30. †† 1 Cor. xv. 58. ‡‡ Acts ii. 40. §§ Ezek. xxxvi. 26. ‖‖ Ezek. xviii. 31. ¶¶ Deut. xxx. 6. *** Jer. iv. 4.

the correspondency of the phrases, and it is of great importance that you attend to it.—If any therefore say, "I will sit still, and attempt nothing for my own recovery, till God irresistibly compels me to it;" he seems as like to perish, as that man would be, who seeing the house in flames about him, should not attempt to make his escape, till he felt himself moved by a miracle. Sirs, the dependance of the creature on God, though it be especially, yet it is not only, in spiritual affairs: It runs through all our interests and concerns. We as really depend upon his influence to stretch out our hands, as we do to raise our hearts toward him in prayer. Your fields could no more produce their fruit without his agency, than his word could, without it, become fruitful in your hearts: Yet you plow and sow; and would look upon him as a madman, that upon this principle should decline it, urging, that no crop could be expected, if God did not produce it; and that if he pleased to produce it, it would come up without any human labour. The argument is just the same in that case, as when men plead for the neglect of means or endeavours, from the reality and necessity of a divine concurrence. And if they apply this argument to the concerns of their souls, when they do not apply it to those of their bodies, it plainly shews, that they regard their bodies more than their souls; and that, in pretending to make these excuses, they bely their conscience, and act against the secret conviction of their own heart. Such persons do not deserve to be disputed with, but rather should be solemnly admonished of the danger of such egregious trifling, where eternity is at stake. And sure I am, that it is offering a great affront to the memory of the blessed Paul, when men pretend to encourage themselves in this perverse temper from any thing he has said. For when he gives us, as it were the substance of all I have now been saying, in those comprehensive words, *It is God that worketh in you, both to will, and to do of his good pleasure*;* he is so far from mentioning it as any excuse for remissness and sloth, that he introduces it professedly in the very contrary view, as engaging us to exert ourselves with the utmost vigour in a dependance upon that divine operation. And therefore, as he there expresses it, I say with him, *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;* and if you will not do it, you have reason to tremble in the prospect of a final condemnation from God, aggravated by your having thus irrationally and ungratefully abused the revelation of his grace.

* Phil. ii. 13.

SERMON VIII.

ON REGENERATION.

Of the various Methods of the divine Operation in the Production of this saving Change.

1 Cor. xii. 6.——*There are Diversities of Operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

WHATEVER the original sense of these words was, and how peculiarly soever they may relate to the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, the whole tenor of the discourse now intended will shew, with how much propriety they may, at least, be accommodated to the operations of his grace. I have proved to you in the last of these lectures, that wherever regeneration is produced, it is ultimately to be ascribed to a divine agency; and though I cannot say, it is equally important, yet I apprehend it may be both agreeable and useful to proceed,

Fifthly, To survey the variety of those methods which God is pleased to take in producing this happy change: Or, to borrow the language of the text, to consider the *diversity of operations*, by which *the same God, who worketh all in all*, (i. e. who produces all the virtues and graces of the christian character, in some degree, in all his people,) is pleased according to his own wise and gracious purposes, to proceed in his agency on those whom he regenerates and saves.

And this survey will not be matter of mere curiosity, but may probably revive the hearts of some amongst you by the recollection of your own experience: And it may be a caution to others, who, for want of due compass and extent of thought and knowledge, are ready to argue, as if God had but one way to work on the human heart, and that one the particular manner by which he recovered them. Of this I shall speak more largely hereafter. In the mean time, I judged it necessary to premise this hint, to direct us as to the temper with which this discourse should be heard, as well as to the purpose to which it is to be improved.

Now what I have to offer on this subject, will be ranged under these three heads. There is a diversity and variety observable,—in the time,—the occasion,—and the manner, of the divine operations on the soul.

1. There is an observable variety, " as to the time of God's gracious operations on different persons."

Some are called in their infancy:—Others, and these perhaps the greatest part, are wrought upon in youth:—And some very few in the advance, and even in the decline of life.

1. Some are wrought upon by divine grace " in their infancy."

This is often the case; and I doubt not, but if parents were to do their duty, it would much more frequently be so. And it is an honour which God is pleased, in some instances, remarkably to confer on a good education; which is indeed so important a duty on one side, and so great a privilege on the other, that it is the less to be wondered at, that he so mercifully encourages christian parents in the discharge of it; thus granting, as it were, an immediate reward for this labour of love. And I must here take the freedom, on my own observation, to say, that God seems especially to own the faithful endeavours of pious mothers in this respect. He has wisely and graciously given that sex a peculiar tenderness of address, and an easy and insinuating manner, which is admirably adapted to this great end, for which no doubt he especially intended it, that of conveying knowledge to children, and making tender impressions on their minds: And there is hardly any view, in which the importance of the sex more evidently appears.

We have encouragement to believe, there are a considerable number, who are as it were *sanctified from the womb*, and in whom the seeds of divine grace are sown, before they grow up to a capacity of understanding the public preaching of the word: A remark, which Mr. Baxter carries so far as to say, " that he believes, if the duties of religious education were conscientiously discharged, preaching would not be God's ordinary method of converting souls; but the greater part would be wrought upon before they were capable of entering into the design of a sermon." And indeed it seems to me, that children may early come to have some apprehensions of what is most important in religion. They may have a reverence for God, and a love for him, as that great Father, who made them, and that kind friend who gives them every thing that they have:

They may have a fear of doing any thing that would displease him: And though it is not so easy for them, to understand the doctrines peculiar to a Redeemer; yet when they hear of Christ as the *Son of God*, who *came down from heaven*, to teach men and children the way thither; who loved them, and did them good every day, and at last died to deliver them from death and hell; their little hearts may well be impressed with such thoughts as these, and they may find a growing desire, to be instructed in what Christ is, and what he taught and did, and to do what shall appear to be his will. And wherever this is the prevailing disposition, it seems to me, that the seeds of holiness are sown in that soul, though but small proficiency may be made in knowledge, and though the capacities for service may be very low.

I will add, that some remarkably pertinent and solid things, which little children have said concerning religion, seem to me plainly to evidence, that they have been, in many instances, under some uncommon teachings of the divine spirit: And it seems perfectly suitable to the genius of christianity, that in this sense, God should *Ordain strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings**, and should *Reveal* to them what he *has* suffered to be *hidden from the wise and prudent*†. Nor can I suppose it hard for any, who have been for a considerable time acquainted with the state of religion in christian societies, to recollect various instances, in which persons thus early *taught of God*, who have heard, and known, and loved the scriptures, and delighted in ordinances and serious discourse from their childhood, have been in some measure like Samuel, Obadiah, Jeremiah, Josiah, and Timothy, honoured with eminent usefulness in the church, and have happily filled some of its most important stations of service. Almost every age has afforded instances of this; and I am persuaded many are now growing up amongst us, who will be instances of it in ages yet to come.

2. Others, and these perhaps the greatest part of real christians, are wrought upon "in their youthful days."

Many parents are very deficient in a due care to cultivate the infant minds of their little ones; or the feeble and general impressions then made, are perhaps worn out and lost, in the growing *vanities of childhood and youth*. They begin

* Psal. viii. 2. † Mat. xi. 25.

to be drawn away by evil inclinations and examples, and by the delusions of a flattering world, which then puts on its most attractive charms, to gain upon their unexperienced minds: And hereupon they *Follow after vanity, and become vain**: *Of the rock which begat them,* they grow *unmindful, and forget the God that formed them*†. But by one method or another, God often stops them in this dangerous career; and awakening ordinances, or more awakening providences, bring them to a stand, and turn them the contrary way. *The terrors of the Lord set themselves in array against* them‡; or his mercy melts their souls, and they yield themselves its willing captives. They consecrate their hearts, warm as they are with youthful vigour, to be the sacrifices of divine love, and enter, it may be, very early *into the bonds of* God's *covenant*; and so prove such *A seed to serve him,* as is *accounted to the Lord for a* most honourable and useful *generation*§. Blessed be God, I speak to many who know this by experience! By far the greater part of those, who have been admitted to your communion, since I settled among you, have been, as I apprehend, under the age of twenty four years: And several of those, who were farther advanced in life when they first approached the table of the Lord, had been brought to real religion in their much earlier years; though particular circumstances, or some mistaken apprehensions, might prevent their giving up their names publicly to the Lord, so soon as they might, and as they ought to have done it.

3. Some few are wrought upon by divine grace "in the advance, and even in the decline of life."

I confess, that the number of these is comparatively small: And it is not to be wondered at, that it is so. They are not many, who arrive to what can properly be called old age; and of them, but a very inconsiderable part are then brought to any thing which looks like a saving change. Nor shall we be much surprised at this, if we consider the inveterate nature of bad habits, which render it almost as hard, for them *that are accustomed to do evil,* to learn *to do good,* as it is for *The Ethiopian to change his skin, or the leopard his spots* ‖. To such a degree are prejudices rivetted in the mind, so insensible is it rendered of tender and generous impressions, so cold are the affections, and the memory (if the phrase may be allowed) so rigid, that humanly

* 2 Kings xvii. 15. † Deut. xxxii. 18. ‡ Job vi. 4.
§ Psal. xxii. 30. ‖ Jer. xiii. 23.

speaking, there is much less probability of their being impressed with religion, than there was when they were in the bloom of life, notwithstanding all the seeming advantages which might arise from riper reason, deeper experience, and a nearer prospect of eternity. In all these things it is in vain to reason against observation of fact, since we evidently see how uncommon a thing it is, for persons to be awakened and reformed in old age; especially if they have been educated in the principles of religion, and have made a florid profession of it in their youth, from which they have afterwards apostatized, out of a love to the wealth or honours of the world, or a relish for sensual delights. Such persons generally live and die monuments of divine wrath, bearing as it were, in characters dreadfully legible, the sad inscription of those, "who, having forsaken God, are finally forsaken of him." They appear as dry *Trees twice dead*, and fit for nothing but to be *plucked up by the roots, and cast into the fire**.

Nevertheless, to prove the infinite energy and sovereignty of divine grace, God is sometimes pleased to work even on such. He touches the rock, which has stood for ages unmoved, and the waters flow forth: He says to *The dry bones, live*†, and they obey; they are clothed with beauty, they are animated with life, and stand up as with the vigour of a renewed youth, to pursue the labours of religion, and to fight *The battles of the Lord*‡. Such instances in which aged sinners have been thus wrought upon, I have read and heard; though (I grieve to say it) I can recollect very few, if any, that have occurred to me, within the sphere of my own personal observation and acquaintance,

But besides this variety in the time, there is also,

II. An observable diversity, "in the occasion, which divine grace takes to operate upon different persons."

The occasions are indeed so various, that it would be impossible to enumerate them: I shall however just touch on some of the chief.

And here I might particularly consider a religious education in this view, and that daily converse with pious friends, which is of course connected with it. But though perhaps there may be no occasion more considerable in itself, and none that

* Jude, ver. 12. John xv. 6. † Ezek. xxxvii. 3. ‡ 1 Sam. xviii. 17.

has been more eminently honoured of God; yet it is proper to wave it here, as having been mentioned under the former head, as well as much more largely illustrated in my sermons on that subject, which are in most of your houses, and which, I hope, you will often review.

I proceed therefore farther to observe,—that some are wrought upon by the word of God;—others by some remarkable providence;—some by little incidents, which, inconsiderable as they seem in themselves, grow memorable by the noble effects they are made to produce;—and others by secret and immediate impressions of God upon their spirits, which cannot be resolved into any external cause, or any visible occasion at all.

1. "The administration of divine ordinances, and especially the word of God and prayer," is an occasion, which he most frequently takes, to work upon men's hearts by his grace.

I do not mention the administration of the sacraments upon this occasion; because, though they have so noble and effectual a tendency to improve men's minds in piety, and to promote christian edification; yet I do not remember to have heard of any instance, in which they have been the means of men's conversion; which is the less to be wondered at, as they are appointed for a very different end.

There are many however that have been wrought upon in prayer, as there are many things concur in this to awaken and impress the mind. The solemn acknowledgments then made of the divine perfections, the praises offered to his tremendous majesty, the deep and humble confession of our various and aggravated guilt in his holy presence, the lamentations over it, the importunate pleadings for a variety of blessings both for time and eternity; in a word, all the overflowings of pious affections in the breast of him that leads the devotion, and especially the earnest entreaties then offered for unconverted sinners, the genuine expressions of an undissembled apprehension of their danger, and the fervent breathings after divine grace, to be communicated to them for their spiritual life: All these things, I say, and many more, which occur in prayer, when it is managed aright, may, by the divine blessing, be singularly useful. And I am well assured, there have been happy instances, in which, *While* God's people have *yet* been *speaking* to him on this head, he has graciously *heard*, and signally *answered** them.

* Isa. lxv. 24.

But the reading, and especially the preaching of the word, is the grand occasion and instrument in the conversion of souls. *Of his own will he begets them with the word of truth** : And it is admirably suited to those saving impressions, which it is intended to make on the heart, being *Quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword*†. It was while Paul was preaching, *That the Lord opened Lydia's heart*, so *that she attended to the things which were spoken* by him‡ : And it was while Peter was thus employed, that such vast multitudes *Were pricked in their hearts, and said to* him, *and to the rest of the apostles* present, *men and brethren, what shall we do*§ ? And I am well persuaded, that, various and lamentable as the instances are, in which men stop their ears, and harden their hearts against it, God does not even to this day *leave it without witness ;* but the *terrors of the Lord*, as displayed by his faithful ministers, have subdued their thousands, and the *riches of his grace* their ten thousands, when illustrated by those, who have not only heard, but have themselves tasted of their sweetness. *The preaching of the cross* may indeed *to them that perish* be *foolishness ;* but blessed be his name who died upon it, there is still a happy remnant, to whom it appears to be *The power of God, and the wisdom of God*‖. Evangelical subjects, when opened with perspicuity, and enforced with vigour and tenderness, by those that have experienced the transforming energy of them on their own hearts, and desire above all things to be *Wise to win* the *souls* of others¶, are generally the occasion of producing the most immediate, and the most important change ; as, I doubt not, but many now present have seen and felt. And the observation of every year of life convinces me more and more, that they who desire to be signally instrumental in this good work, this work, of all others the most benevolent and important, must, in the account of a vain world, *Become fools, that they may be wise***. How contemptuously soever it may be fashionable to treat such preaching, we must make these subjects familiar to our hearers, and must treat them with all plainness of speech, and all seriousness of address, or we shall generally *Labour in vain, and spend our strength for nought*††: Would to God, that the teachers of our Israel may consider the importance of it, and grow wise by such experiments as these! that they may act the part of prudent physicians, who prescribe the medicines they find in fact most useful, and not

* Jam. i. 18. † Heb. iv. 12. ‡ Acts xvi. 14. § Acts ii. 37.
‖ 1 Cor. i. 18, 24. ¶ Prov. xi. 30. ** 1 Cor. iii. 18. †† Isa. xlix. 4.

those concerning which the finest speculations may be framed. Till then, whatever their learning, politeness, and parade may be, it cannot be expected, that our health should be generally recovered; but we are like to continue, what we have long been, a vicious people, amidst the finest encomiums of virtue, that are any where to be found: Nor will there be much room to wonder if some of its most eloquent advocates should appear, even in their own practice, insensible of those charms which they so gracefully recommend to others, and sink in their character below those heathen moralists, whom they may chuse to imitate, rather than Christ and his apostles. Nevertheless I am persuaded, that if God intend mercy for us as a people, he will support among us a succession of those, who shall dispense his ordinances in such a manner, as he has generally chosen to honour with success. But though the greater part of sincere converts are reduced by these, I am to add,

2. That "remarkable providences, whether merciful, or afflictive," are occasions, which God takes, to work upon the hearts of many others.

When ordinances have long been attended in vain, God perhaps interposes by other more peculiar and signal methods, to *Pluck* the trifling and lethargic sinner *as a firebrand out of the burning**.

Sometimes remarkable mercies and deliverances accomplish the work. An appearance of God in their favour, when they are conscious to themselves that they are the unworthiest of all his creatures, shall shame and melt them, and powerfully prevail on their minds to *turn unto the Lord;* who *Daily loads* them *with* his *benefits*†, and thus seems, in more senses than one, to *Send from heaven* to save them, and to *draw them out of many waters*, in which they had otherwise been lost‡.

But we more frequently see, that afflictions are the means of performing this happy work. By a gracious severity God is pleased to lay hold on many, and to give them reason to bless the hand, which, though by a rough motion, delivers them from the flames that were kindling around them, and shews *The Lord* to *be merciful to* them§. Like Jonah in the ship, they are awakened by a storm, to *call upon* their *God*‖: Like *Manasseh* they are *taken among the thorns, and laid in fetters*, that they may be brought to *know the Lord*¶: Like the jailor, they

* Amos iv. 11. † Psal. lxviii. 19. ‡ Psal. xviii. 16. § Gen. xix. 16.
‖ Jonah i. 6. ¶ 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, 13.

are shaken with an *Earthquake*, and *trembling*, and astonished they *fall down*, and enquire *what they shall do to be saved**? The terrifying fear of the approach of death, or the distressing weight of some calamity which threatens every moment to swallow them up in destruction, rouzes their consciences to an attention to those divine truths which they had long forgotten, and opens those records of guilt which they had studiously sealed up.

And there seems to be no affliction by which God more frequently works upon men than by sickness. When he weakens their capacity for the business of life, and spoils their relish for its enjoyments; when he confines them to their chambers, or even to their beds, and *Makes their chain* strait and *heavy*†; when he threatens to *Take them away in the midst of their days*‡, to *Deprive them of the residue of their years*§, and immediately to bring them before that awful tribunal, for which they know in their own consciences they are so ill prepared: Then do we often see the accomplishment of that observation which Elihu made so many ages ago; *He chasteneth* a man *with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain, so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat; his flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen, stick out; yea, his soul draweth near to the grave, and his life to the destroyers:* But sending him *an Interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness, then he is gracious to him, and saith,* in a spiritual as well as a literal sense, *Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom*‖.—Blessed be God, instances of this kind have been known, and known among us, in which the sickness of the body has wrought the cure of the soul, under the conduct of the great physician of both; and has so proved eminently to the glory of God, and the good of those who *For a while* have been *in heaviness*¶.

Yet it must be acknowledged, that in other instances the remorse which a man expresses upon a sick bed, and in the near views of eternity, proves but like that of some condemned malefactor, who, when he has obtained a pardon, throws off all those appearances of repentance with which he had once deceived himself, and perhaps deceived others too, and plunges himself anew into capital crimes; it may be, into crimes for which he afterwards suffers death without those compunctions of consci-

* Acts xvi. 26—30. † Lam. iii. 7. ‡ Psal. cii. 24.
§ Isai. xxxviii. 10. ‖ Job xxxiii. 19—24. ¶ 1 Pet. i. 6.

ence which he before felt, being hardened by a return into sin attended with such dreadful aggravations.—This has been the case of many ; and I pray God it may not be thus with any of you. But if there be any among you that were once under powerful awakenings ; any, that have cried out of *Terrors on every side* *; that have confessed your sins, it may be, with greater freedom, and a more particular detail of circumstances, than the minister who attended you could have desired, and have resolved against them with all the appearances of the most determinate purpose ; and yet after all, have returned with *The sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire* †: Such have peculiar reason to be alarmed and terrified. Every day of divine patience toward such is astonishing. And if to all this have been added the returns of danger, and signal interpositions of providence for your deliverance, and yet there be no kindly impressions of penitence and gratitude on your hearts, they who know the particulars of the case, must surely look upon you with horror as well as with wonder : For what can one imagine of such, but that they are given over by God to a darkness which nothing but the flames of hell can enlighten, and a hardness which nothing can penetrate but the sharpness of *unquenchable fire*, and the gnawings of the *never-dying worm* ?

But to return from a digression into which compassion towards such a deplorable case has insensibly led me, I would farther observe, that as these various interpositions of a remarkable providence are often the means of working saving impressions on men's minds, so

3. God is sometimes pleased to over rule " little and inconsiderable incidents in life," as the occasion of accomplishing this happy change.

As the *Treasure* of the gospel was at first put *into earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might* appear to *be of God, and not of man* ‡; so God, to *Make his* own *praise glorious*§, is sometimes pleased to produce the most important effects, by causes which seem in themselves least considerable. And it is astonishing to see from how small and seemingly unpromising a seed this plant of paradise springs up, and with how little cultivation too in some instances, after *Paul* had long attempted in vain to *plant*, and *Apollos* to *water*‖.—A few lines in the bible, or any other good book, perhaps taken up by chance, shall be the instrument ; and a passage, on which the

* Job xviii. 11. † 2 Pet. ii. 22. ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 7. § Psal. lxvi. 2. ‖ 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

eye glances without expectation or design, shall strike to the heart, like an arrow from the bow of God himself, after quivers of the most pointed and polished shafts have been exhausted in vain; though such shafts were most skilfully aimed, and most vigorously discharged.—In other instances, a word dropped in conversation, and that perhaps no way remarkable either for its spirit or propriety, shall do that which the most solemn ordinances have not been capable of doing: An important encouragement, by the way, to abound in religious discourse, which God has sometimes been pleased to honour as the happy means of saving a soul from death, and laying a foundation for the delights of an everlasting friendship with those who have been so recovered.

4. Sometimes this great work is accomplished "by secret and immediate impressions from God upon the mind," without any visible means, instruments, or occasions at all.

These things do not frequently happen; nor does it seem fit they should, lest any should be encouraged to expect them in the neglect of the appointed means. Nevertheless it is plain in fact, that God is sometimes pleased to go out of the common way; and his mighty hand is to be acknowledged in it. The reasons are known to himself; and the praise is humbly to be ascribed to him, who *Giveth not an account of any of his matters**.

It is not, to be sure, so common now as it was in the days of Elihu, that God should speak to *Men in a dream*, or *seal instructions* to them *in slumberings on their bed*†: Yet I have myself known several who have ascribed their first religious awakenings to some awful dream, in which the solemnity of the judgment day, or a view of the invisible world, has been represented to them with unspeakable terror; and others, to whom, when they have waked in the night, some words of scripture have occurred with such power, that they have not been able to divert their thoughts to any thing else; and that, when they themselves have not certainly known whether they were in the bible or not.

I have known those that, in the circle of their vain companions, and in the midst of their sensual delights, have been struck to the very heart with some such scripture as this; *To be carnally minded is death*‡: Or such a text as this has on a sudden

* Job xxxiii. 13. † Job xxxiii. 15, 16. ‡ Rom. viii. 6.

darted into their minds; *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men**. Such passages have seemed to ring and thunder in their ears till the sound of their music, and the noise of their mirth have been quite overpowered, so that they have been driven from their revels to their knees, and have returned no more into the paths of the destroyer.

Yea, to add no more instances of this kind, I have known those of distinguished genius, polite manners, and great experience in human affairs, who, after having outgrown all the impressions of a religious education, after having been hardened, rather than subdued, by the most singular mercies, even various, repeated, and astonishing deliverances, which have appeared to themselves no less than miraculous; after having lived for years without God in the world, notoriously corrupt themselves, and labouring to the utmost to corrupt others; have been stopped on a sudden in the full career of their sin, and have felt such rays of the divine presence, and of redeeming love, darting in upon their minds, almost like lightning from heaven, as have at once rouzed, overpowered, and transformed them; so that they have come out of their secret chambers with an irreconcileable enmity to those vices, to which, when they entered them, they were the tamest and most abandoned slaves; and have appeared from that very hour, the votaries, the patrons, the champions of religion; and after a course of the most resolute attachment to it, in spite of all the reasonings, or the railleries, the importunities, or the reproaches of its enemies, they have continued to this day some of its brightest ornaments: A change which I behold with equal wonder and delight, and which if a nation should join in deriding it, I would adore as *the finger of God.*

In mentioning these things thus publicly, I do indeed take an uncommon freedom, which some may perhaps censure; but so far as human testimony can give an assurance of truth, I may justly say that *I speak what I know, and testify what*, in its genuine and powerful effects, *I have* myself *seen*†. And since the possibility of abusing such condescensions of divine mercy did not prevent their being granted, I cannot think it ought to engage me to be silent, when so natural an opportunity offered of declaring them, *To the* glory *of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will*‡. Yet I must repeat the caution, which I before suggested, that it would be madness for

* Rom. i. 18. † John iii. 11. ‡ Ephes. i. 11.

any to neglect God's appointed means of operation, or presumption that they shall be added to the small list of those who have been such uncommon and astonishing trophies of the efficacy and sovereignty of divine grace.

These remarks must for the present suffice, with regard to the various occasions by which God works upon men's minds; and I hope you will excuse me, if, in illustrating some of them, I have a little anticipated some things which might have been mentioned under the third head, in which I proposed,

III. To consider some varieties observable in "the manner in which divine grace operates on the mind."

And this variety, by the way, will be observable in many instances where the occasions are in general the same. Thus among those that are awakened by the word of God, or by his providence,—some are shaken by strong terrors;—some are melted into deep sorrows;—others are astonished, as it were, and captivated at once, by the discovery of the love of God in Christ;—and others are led on by such gentle and gradual impressions, that they can hardly recollect any remarkable circumstance at all relating to the manner in which this blessed work was begun, or conducted in their souls.

1. Some converts are "awakened by strong terror."

It is obvious, that conviction of sin, in some degree or another, is absolutely necessary to make way for the entrance of the gospel into the soul. But the degrees are various in different persons; and as for those of whom we now speak, God *Reproves them* aloud, *and sets their sins in order before them**, marshals them in dreadful array, as the expression imports; so that they seem like defenceless creatures, surrounded with a whole host of enemies, whose weapons are raised for their destruction. Yea, God himself, the great, the terrible, the eternal, and omnipotent God, seems to *Set* them up *as a mark for* those *arrows*†, *The poison of which drinketh up* their *spirits*‡; and, as he himself expresses it, he is unto them *As a bear*, or *a lion*, ready to tear and *rend the* very *caul of their heart* §. They *Come*, as it were, to the trembling and terrifying *mountain* of Sinai, *to blackness, and darkness, and tempest*‖. The conviction of guilt is attended with such a sense of the demerit of sin, as fills

* Psal. l. 21. † Lam. iii. 12. ‡ Job vi. 4.
§ Hos. xiii. 8. ‖ Heb. xii. 18.

them with horror and astonishment, and engages them to wish *in the bitterness of* their *souls*, that they had *never been born*. They are left for a time, and that perhaps for weeks and months, to be, as it were, deafened, with the loud thunders of the law: *A dreadful sound*, as Eliphaz expresses it, *is in their ears**, even the sentence of their own damnation; and the awful curse of an almighty sin-avenging God *Comes into their bowels like water, and like oil into their bones*†. They are filled with such deep remorse for their past sins, that they verily think no iniquity was ever like theirs, and that no punishment will be like theirs. They hardly see a glimmering of hope that they shall obtain deliverance; but expect, in a very little while, to be sealed up under wrath, if they are not already so. When they hear the offers and the promises of the gospel, they can apply none of them to themselves, and find comfort in none: But every threatening and every curse of the book of God seems to have been written as their intended portion. And thus, perhaps, they continue for weeks, or for months together, expecting every day and every night that *Destruction from God*, which is now *a terror to them*‡, should utterly swallow *Them up*, and *leave them neither root nor branch*, neither comfort nor hope §. *The law is a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ* ‖, and it scourges them with most rigorous discipline: Yea, the infernal lion roars over them, though he is not permitted to devour them: He particularly terrifies them when they think of approaching God, as if they were to meet with some peculiar danger there, where alone they can find their relief: Or if they do in broken accents utter their *prayer* before God, he seems to be *shut out*¶, and they are apprehensive that it is *Turned into sin***. Yet there is one thing to be observed in the midst of this scene of horror, and it is a circumstance of great importance; "that they justify God when he seems most inexorable, and subscribe to that sentence as righteous which dooms them to eternal ruin."

2. Others are "melted into deep sorrows."

Their *Eyes run down with tears;* and they are ready to wish that their *head were waters*, and their *eyes fountains, that they might* continue to *weep day and night*††. They see the evil of sin, and the misery to which it has reduced them, in a most deplorable view; and it may be, while those described under the former head are ready to tremble, because they cannot weep,

* Job xv. 21. † Psal. cix. 18. ‡ Job xxxi. 23. § Mal. iv. 1.
‖ Gal. iii. 24. ¶ Lam. iii. 8. ** Psal. cix. 7. †† Jer. ix. 1, 18.

these are ready to weep, because they cannot tremble. They lament, among other things, the want of those strong horrors which some have felt: They cry out, "*Woe is me, for I am undone**; *I have destroyed* myself, and in myself is not my *help* found†:" And it may be, they are a considerable time before they can persuade themselves there is any help for them, even in God. They know there is help in him through Christ for penitent and believing sinners: But they cannot easily be convinced that they believe, because they do not feel that confident trust which some others have much sooner been brought to: And they are afraid, lest whatever they experience which looks like repentance, should be only the false appearance of it, proceeding from mere self-love and a natural dread of future misery. They dwell perpetually on the dark side of things: They read over the catalogue of their iniquities again and again, and attend to those passages in which *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against* every kind and degree of sin‡; while they are *slow of heart* to admit those reviving consolations which the various rich and precious promises of the gospel are so admirably well calculated to administer.

The state of such souls, when they are first savingly enlightened, is like that of the earth, when fogs and mists have veiled the face of the sun after it is risen. But it very often happens with respect to such souls, that when these mists are at length dispersed, a very bright and cheerful day opens: They are comforted by the warmer beams of the sun of righteousness, according to the hours in which they have been beclouded, and are *Made glad according to the days in which* they were *afflicted*§: And going on to *Fear the Lord*, and to *obey the voice of his servant*, though they have long *walked in darkness, and seen no light*, they are at length encouraged by his Spirit, enforcing the exhortations of his word, to *trust in the name of the Lord, and stay themselves upon their God* ‖.

3. Some are "captivated with astonishing and delightful views of the love of God in Christ."

There is always, as we observed before, in the awakened soul some conviction of sin and apprehension of danger; nevertheless there are instances in which God heals almost as soon as he wounds, and speaks peace almost as soon as he speaks trouble. He graciously shortens, to some souls, the

* Isa. vi. 5. † Hos. xiii. 9. ‡ Rom. i. 18.
§ Psal. xc. 15. ‖ Isa. l. 10.

pangs of the new birth, and *Gives them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness**. The news of salvation by the blood, and righteousness, and grace of Christ, is received with so thankful a sense, with so joyful a compliance, that the soul, feeling beyond all doubt the cordial sincerity with which it embraces the offer is filled with *Joy unspeakable and full of glory*†: The heart *Does magnify the Lord, and the Spirit rejoices in God its Saviour*‡.

This was remarkably the case of the Jailor, who in the very night in which he was converted, that same night in which *The foundation of his house* had been *shaken*, and his own soul too shaken, by *an earthquake*, so that he had endeavoured to lay violent hands on himself: yet, I say, that very night, before the day appeared, having been directed to *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ* that he might *be saved*, and been enabled by divine grace to comply with the exhortation, it is added concerning him, that *he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house* §.—Thus too the Thessalonians, though they *Received the word in much affliction*, and ran the risk of losing their possessions and their lives in adhering to it, yet received it *with joy of the Holy Ghost*‖. And though I cannot say this is God's most ordinary way of dealing, and though I fear the counterfeit appearance of such a work as this often leaves men in the number of those whom our Lord represents by *Stony ground hearers*¶; yet it is certain some instances of this kind are still to be found. But then I must observe, this is a joy attended with the deepest humility, and animates the soul to the most ardent and affectionate resolution of *Walking worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being strengthened with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness***.

4. Others, and these perhaps the greatest part of such as are religiously educated, are "led on by such gentle and insensible degrees, that they can hardly recollect any remarkable circumstances that have attended their conversion, nor can certainly fix on the particular time of it."

God is sometimes, as in the preceding instances, *In the whirlwind, the earthquake, and the fire;* but he is also frequently *in the still small voice*††. The operations of the holy

* Isa. lxi. 3. † 1 Pet. i. 8. ‡ Luke i. 46, 47. § Acts xvi. 34.
‖ 1 Thes. i. 6. ¶ Matt. xiii. 20, 21. ** Col. i. 10, 11. †† 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

Spirit on the soul are often, and perhaps generally, of such a nature, that it is difficult exactly to distinguish them from the rational exercise of our own thoughts; because the Spirit operates by suggesting rational views of things, and awakening rational affections. For whatever some have vainly and dangerously insinuated, nothing is so rational as the sentiments and temper which prevail in renewed souls, and to which it is the work of God's regenerating Spirit to bring them.

These operations, where there is a religious education, often begin very early; but then, in some degree, the impressions wear off from the weak and flexible mind; and perhaps there are various instances in which they alternately revive and decay again. And this vicissitude of affectionate applications to religion, under moving ordinances, afflictions, or deliverances, and of backslidings and remissness in it, may be permitted, with respect to many, to continue for a long time. At length, under the various methods of providence and grace, the soul arrives to greater steadiness, and a more habitual victory over the remainders of indwelling sin: But it may be exceeding hard, and perhaps absolutely impossible, to determine concerning some remarkable scenes through which it has passed, whether such a one in particular, perhaps the last which strikes the memory, were the season of its new birth, or whether it were merely a recovery from such a degree of negligence and remissness, as may possibly be consistent with real religion, and be found in a regenerate soul.

These balancings of backsliding and recovery often occasion very great perplexity; and such sort of converts are frequently much discouraged, because they cannot give the history of their religious experiences in so clear and distinct a manner as others; and particularly, because they have not passed through such violent terrors and agitations of mind as many, who were perhaps once sunk into much deeper degeneracy, have done. Nevertheless, where there is a consciousness of an undissembled love to God, an unreserved devotedness to his service, a cordial trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a sincere affection to mankind in general, and especially *to those of the household of faith*, a man ought not to perplex himself on this account. For as every man knows he was born into the world, by a consciousness that he now lives and acts here, though it is impossible he should remember any thing of the time or circumstances in which he was first produced into it: So may a christian be assured that some way or another he was *born of the Spirit*, if he

can trace its genuine fruits and efficacious influences, in a renewed heart and life.

I have thus laid down several particulars, which appeared to me important, in order to illustrate that diversity which is observable in the methods of the divine operation on the heart: And they will naturally lead us to these three reflections, with which I shall conclude my present discourse.—Let us not make our own experiences a standard for others;—nor the experiences of others a standard for ourselves;—nor let us be unwilling, in a prudent manner, to communicate our spiritual experiences to each other.

[1.] Let us not make our own experiences a standard for others.

Let us remember that there is, as we have heard, a diversity of operations; and that many a person may be a dear child of God, who was not born just with those circumstances which attended our own regeneration. Others may not so particularly have discerned the time, the occasion, the progress of the change: They may not have felt all that we felt, either in a way of extraordinary terror or extraordinary comfort; and yet perhaps may equal or even exceed us in that holy temper to which it was the great intention of our heavenly Father, by one method or another, to bring all his children. Nay I will add, that christians of a very amiable and honourable character may express themselves but in a dark, and something of an improper manner, concerning the doctrine of regeneration, and may, in conscience, scruple the use of some phrases relating to it, which we judge to be exceeding suitable; and yet, that very scruple which displeases us may proceed from a reverence for God and truth, and from such a tenderness of heart as is the effect of his renewing grace. We should therefore be very cautious how we judge each other, and take upon us to reject those whom perhaps God has received.

I remember good Dr. Owen, whose candour was in many respects very remarkable, carries this so far, as somewhere to say, "that some may perhaps have experienced the saving influences of the holy Spirit on their hearts, who do not in words acknowledge the necessity, or even the reality of those influences." Judging men's hearts, and judging their states, is a work for which we are so ill qualified, that we have reason to be exceeding thankful it is not assigned to us. And when we are entering into such an examination of their character, as our duty may in some particular circumstances seem to require, we should be very solicitous that we do not lay down arbitrary and

precarious rules. It seems indeed, that so far as we can learn it, we may more safely judge by their present temper and conduct, than by the history of any thing which has formerly passed in their minds.

And let me add it as a necessary caution here, that they who never felt any of the extraordinary emotions of mind which have been described under some former heads, but have been brought to religion by less observable methods, perhaps by calm rational views of it, of whom I believe there are great numbers, should be very cautious that they do not rashly censure such things as I have now been representing, as if they were mere enthusiasm. I cannot but think this a criminal *Limiting the Holy One of Israel**, and fear it will be found a boldness highly displeasing to him, and very injurious to the souls of those who allow themselves in it, and of others too, if they be such as are employed in the ministerial work: Not now to insist on what in comparison of this is but a small matter, the apparent rudeness and petulancy of contradicting facts so well attested as many of this kind have been, and running counter to the solid effects which such impressions have produced. The rashness which prevails under different forms among men of the most opposite sentiments, is too obvious; but if we would give ourselves leave calmly to weigh and consider matters, our spirits would be rendered on all sides more moderate, and many harsh and hasty censures would be suspended, which at present prove very little more, than the ignorance, pride, and folly of those that pass them.

[2.] Let us not make the experiences of others a standard for ourselves.

This is frequently the case, and especially with those who are naturally of a humble and tender temper; for whose peace and comfort therefore one cannot but be peculiarly solicitous. Having heard of some extraordinary experiences of others, they are ready to imagine, because they can trace nothing correspondent to these in their own minds, that they are utter strangers to real regeneration, and have nothing more than such religious notions and forms, as natural men may easily learn of each other.

But what I have now been saying of the variety of the divine operations on the heart, affords a solid answer to such

* Psal. lxxviii. 41.

scruples when they arise in a pious mind. Reflect, on this occasion, how it is in the works of nature: There we know that God works in all, so that he is the life and existence of the whole creation; and yet, as an excellent writer expresses it, "He alone seems not to work:" His agency is so invisible and secret, that did not reason and scripture join to teach it, one might live a great many years in the world without knowing any thing more, than that such and such effects are produced by correspondent second causes: though in strict propriety of speech they are no causes at all, but owe all their efficacy to the divine presence and operation. Sense tells us that the sun enlightens the earth, and warms it; that the rain waters it, the seeds produce vegetables, and the animals continue their proper race: But that God is *The Father of lights**, that he *Has prepared the light and the sun†;* that he *Visits the earth*, and causes rain to descend into *the furrows thereof‡*, so as to make *The grass to grow for cattle*, and corn *and herb for the service of man§;* that he *Sends forth his Spirit*, and the animal race *is created, and the face of the earth renewed‖;* this I say, is what multitudes of the human race are not aware of; because in all these things he acts in a gentle, stated, and regular manner, and employs inferior agents as the instruments of his providence. And just thus gentle, silent, and regular are the influences of his Spirit upon men's souls; and it is often impossible exactly to distinguish them from the teachings of parents and ministers, and from those reflections which seem to spring from our own minds, though it is he *That gives* us *counsel*, while *our reins instruct us* in our secret musings¶, and that teaches us to profit by the lessons which others give us.

Be not therefore surprised, and be not dejected, though you cannot assign the place, the time, the manner, in which your conversion began; and though you are strangers to the terrors, the sorrows, or the transports of joy, which you have heard one and another express. *The wind bloweth where it listeth*, and the Spirit dispenses his influences where and when, and in what measure and degree he pleases: But while the way and manner of his operation may be secret and unknown, the effects of it are sensible and evident; and as with regard to *The wind, thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit***. You may not certainly know when to fix the

* Jam. i. 17. † Psal. lxxiv. 16. ‡ Psal. lxv. 9, 10. § Psal. civ. 14.
‖ Psal. civ. 30. ¶ Psal. xvi. 7. ** John iii. 8.

precise time of your conversion, or how to trace the particular steps by which it has been brought to pass; for *As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all**. But though you cannot trace the process of the operation, the effects of it are such as you may feel within you, and *By* its *fruits* it will be *known*†. It is indeed desirable, to be able to give an account of the beginning and the progress of the work of God upon your souls, as some that are regenerate can do; but this is not necessary to evidence the truth of grace. Happy is he who in this case can say, as the blind man in the gospel, *One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see*‡. For as you know that there is fire when you see the flame, though you know not how or when it began: So also it may be discerned, that you have really undergone a saving change, though you know not how or when it was wrought in your hearts. If you answer the characters I laid down in the preceding discourses, as essential to the truly regenerate, which are all comprehended in repentance and faith, producing an unfeigned love and uniform obedience, you may trace the cause from the effect with far greater certainty than you could have traced such an effect, as what would infallibly follow from any cause, which you could have perceived in your mind previous to it. There may be great awakenings, violent terrors, and ecstatic joys, where there is no saving work of God on the soul: But where the divine image is produced, and the soul is actually renewed, we are sure, as was before observed, that grace has been working, though we know not when, or where, or how.——And therefore on the whole, guarding against both these extremes, and to cure them both.

[3.] Let christians, in a prudent and humble manner, be ready to communicate their religious experiences to each other.

God undoubtedly intended that the variety of his operations should be observed and owned in the world of grace, as well as in that of nature; and as these things pass in the secret recesses of men's hearts, how should they be known, unless they will themselves communicate and declare them? And let me caution you against that strange averseness to all freedoms of this kind which, especially in persons of a reserved temper, is so

* Eccl. xi. 5. † Matt. vii 20. ‡ John ix. 25.

ready to prevail. Let not any think it beneath them to do it. You well know that David, who was not only a man of an admirable genius, but a mighty prince too, was far from thinking it so; on the contrary, deeply impressed with the divine condescension in all the gracious visits he had received from him, he calls, as it were, the whole pious world around him, that they might be edified and comforted by the relation: *Come*, says he, *and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul**. He proclaimed it, not with his voice and harp alone, but with his immortal pen: And many other noble and excellent persons concurred with him; and the invaluable treasure of their experiences, in as great a variety of circumstances as we can well imagine, is transmitted to us in the book of psalms. Can any just reason then be assigned, why they who live under a nobler dispensation, and a more abundant communication of the Spirit, should be entirely silent on this subject?

There may indeed be an over-forwardness which is the apparent effect of pride and self-conceit, and which, with thinking people, may bring even the sincerity of the speaker into question, or put his indiscretion beyond all possibility of being questioned. But it would be very unreasonable to argue, that because a thing may be done ill, it cannot possibly be done well.

Why may not intimate friends open their hearts to each other on such delightful topics? Why may not they who have met with any thing peculiar of this kind communicate it to their minister! And though I must in conscience declare against making it absolutely and universally a term of communion, yet I am well assured, that in some instances, a prudent and serious communication of those things to a christian society, when a person is to be admitted into fellowship with it, has often answered very valuable ends. By this means God has the honour of his own work; and others have the pleasure of sympathizing with the relator, both in his sorrows and his joys; they derive from hence some additional satisfaction as to his fitness for an approach to the Lord's table; they learn with pleasure the divine blessing which attends the administration of ordinances among them; and make observations and remarks which may assist them in offering their addresses to God, and in giving proper advices to others who are in circumstances like those related. To all which we may add, that the ministers of Christ do, in particular, learn what may be a means of forming them

* Psal. lxvi. 16.

to a more experimental manner of preaching, as well as in many instances discover those, before unknown, tokens of success which may strengthen their hands in the work of their great Master.

It is by frequent conversations of this kind, that I have learnt many of the particulars on which I have grounded the preceding discourse. I hope therefore you will excuse me, if on so natural an occasion I have borne my public testimony to what has been so edifying to me, both as a minister and a christian. And the tender regard which I have for young persons training up for the work of the ministry, and my ardent desire that they may learn the language of Sion, and have "those peculiar advantages which nothing but an acquaintance with cases, and an observation on facts can give," has been a farther inducement to me to add this reflection, with which I conclude my discourse; humbly hoping that what you have heard upon this occasion will, by divine blessing, furnish out agreeable matter for such conversation as I have now recommended, to the glory of God, and to the advancement of religion among you. Amen!

SERMON IX.

ON REGENERATION.

Directions to awakened Sinners.

Acts ix. 6.——*And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*

THESE are the words of *Saul, who also is called Paul**, when he was stricken to the ground as he was going to Damascus: And any one who had looked upon him in his present circumstances, and known nothing more of him than that view, in comparison with his past life, could have given, would have imagined him one of the most miserable creatures that ever lived upon earth, and would have expected that he should very soon have been numbered amongst the most miserable of those in hell. He was engaged in a course of such savage cruelty, as can, upon no principle of common morality, be vindicated, even though the Christians had been as much mistaken, as he rashly and foolishly concluded they were. After having dragged *Many of them* into *prison*, and *given his voice against* some that *were put to death*, he *persecuted* others *into strange cities*; and had now obtained a *commission from the* Sanhedrim at Jerusalem to carry this holy, or rather this impious war into Damascus†, and to bring all the proselytes to the religion of the blessed Jesus, *Bound* from thence *to Jerusalem*‡; probably that they might there be animadverted upon with greater severity than could safely have been attempted by the Jews in so distant a city, under a foreign governor.

But, behold, as he was *In the way*, Jesus interposes, cloathed with a *lustre* exceeding that of the *sun* at noon §. He strikes him down from the beast on which he rode, and lays him prostrate on *The ground*, calling to him with *a voice* far more dreadful than that of thunder, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me*‖?

Any one would have imagined, from the circumstances in which he now beheld Saul, that divine vengeance had already

* Acts xiii. 9. † Acts xxvi. 10—12. ‡ Acts ix. 2.
§ Acts xxvi. 13. ‖ Acts ix. 4.

begun to seize him, and that full execution would quickly have been done. But God's *Ways are not as our ways, nor are his thoughts as our thoughts**. Christ laid him almost as low as hell, that he might raise him as high as the *third heaven* †; of which he afterwards gave him a view in vision, to anticipate his reception into it. This day of his terror and astonishment was, in a nobler sense than any other, the day of his birth; for he is brought to bow himself at the foot of an injured Saviour, to offer him as it were a blank upon which to write his own terms of peace; and as soon as he heard that this glorious person was *Jesus, whom*, in his members *he* had so long *persecuted*, he makes his submission in these lively comprehensive words, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*——This was not a time for a long speech; but he that discerns all the secret recesses of the spirit, knew these few words were full of a most important meaning, and expressed not only a grief of heart for all that he had before been doing against Christ and his kingdom, but the sincerest resolution for the future to employ himself in his service, waiting only the intimations of his wise and gracious will, as to the most proper and acceptable manner of beginning the attempt.

There is, methinks, a poignant kind of eloquence in this short expression, far beyond what any paraphrase upon it can give: And our compassionate Lord accepted this surrender. All his former rebellions were no more remembered against him; and before he rose from the ground to which he fell, on so terrible an occasion, Christ gave him an intimation, not only that his forfeited life should be spared, so that he should get safe into the city to which he was bound, but that he should there be instructed in that service which *Jesus, whom he had persecuted*, would now condescend to receive at his hands.

I represent the case thus largely, because I hope it is a case which in some measure suits the experience of some that hear me this evening. Paul tells us, it was *For this reason*, among others, that he himself *obtained mercy*, though he was *the chief of sinners, that in him*, as the chief, *Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should afterwards believe*‡.

Is there, then, in this assembly, any awakened and convinced sinner; any one that, apprised of his folly, and sensible of his misery, is desirous to fall at the foot of Christ, and say with Saul, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? That which*

* Isa. lv. 8. † 2 Cor. xii. 2. ‡ 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

I see not, teach thou me; and wherein *I have done iniquity I will do so no more**!—To such would I now especially address: And while I put the question, is there any such among us? I would fain persuade myself, there are several: For I humbly hope, that all the labours that have been bestowed in the preceding discourses are not in vain, nor all the prayers that have been offered for their success in vain; prayers, which I doubt not have been carried by many of you into your families and your closets, as well as jointly presented to God in this public assembly. Trusting therefore that it is thus with some, and praying that it may be a more frequent case, I proceed,

Sixthly, to give some directions to such, who are awakened by divine grace to a sense of their misery in an unregenerate state, and are brought to desire recovery from it.

To such I propose to give directions: And to what purpose would it be to undertake to offer them to any others? Who would pretend to teach those who are unconcerned about their salvation, what methods they are to take in order to their becoming truly regenerate? This, methinks, would be like giving directions how those might learn to write who do not desire it, and will not take a pen into their hands. All I could say to such, while they continue in this character, would vanish into empty air: It would not, probably, be so much as observed and remembered. I speak therefore to awakened souls, and to such it is pleasant to address on this head. Ananias undoubtedly undertook this message to Saul with cheerfulness, to tell him what Christ would have him to do: And I would with pleasure and cheerfulness engage in the like work; humbly hoping that some will hear with observation and attention, will hear for themselves, and so *Hear for* their *good*†. And to this purpose let me advise you,—to attend to the impressions that have been made upon you with great seriousness,—to break off every thing that is contrary to them,—to seek for further knowledge in religious matters,—to pour out your souls before God in earnest prayer,—to communicate the state of your case to some experienced christian,—to acquaint yourselves with such as are much in your own circumstances,—to fly immediately to Christ, as ready to receive all that come to him,—to dedicate yourselves to him, and to his service, in the most solemn manner,—to arm yourselves to encounter with the greatest difficulties in your christian

* Job xxxiv. 32. † Job v. 27.

course,—and finally, to take every step in this attempt with a deep sense of your own weakness, and a humble dependance upon divine grace to be communicated to you as the matter requires.—These are the several directions I would offer to you: And may they be impressed in such a manner on your souls, that none of you may *Lose the things* that *have* been *wrought* *; but by the effectual *Working of* the *mighty power* of God †, such as he graciously has been pleased to *Bring to the birth*, may be *brought forth*‡, and such as are awakened may be savingly renewed!

1. I would advise you to "attend to the impressions made upon you with great seriousness."

They may perhaps take you a little off the world, and its concernments; and some will blame you for suffering such an interruption: But regard not that censure. The time will come, if you pursue these things aright, when renewed diligence, prudence, and the divine blessing, will amply make amends for any present hindrance which these impressions may occasion. And if it should be otherwise, were there not a cause? If a man seized with a threatening distemper should choose for a little while to lay aside his usual business, that he might attend to the care of his health, before the symptoms grew incurable, would any body blame him for this? On the contrary, would it not be looked upon as acting a very wise, prudent, and necessary part? Much more may it be said here, *It is not a light thing for you, because it is your life* §: And if *The life* is *more than meat, and the body than raiment* ‖, then surely the soul is more to be regarded than either. And therefore what you do in your worldly affairs, do moderately; and do not grudge that retirement which is so necessary in such a tender circumstance as this.—I may apply to you, on this occasion, those words of Solomon; *Through desire a man having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom*¶. If you desire to attain divine wisdom, you must separate yourself from all other things to pursue it.—And it is the more necessary to attend to this now, because the tempter may probably contrive to lay some more than ordinary avocation in your way, at a time when the interest of his kingdom requires you should be diverted from prosecuting those views which are presenting themselves to you, and by which you may

* 2 John, ver. 8. † Ephes. i. 19. ‡ Isa. lxvi. 9.
§ Deut. xxxii. 47. ‖ Matt. vi. 25. ¶ Prov. xviii. 1.

so probably be rescued out of his hands, and put for ever out of his power.

2. Let me advise you to "break off every thing which is contrary to such impressions as these."

Sin will immediately appear to have been your disease and your ruin; and therefore, if ever you hope for recovery, you must resolutely break with that; not merely with this or that particular evil, but with every sin; and that only for a little while, but entirely and for ever. A mortal irreconcileable war must be declared against it. Every fleshly lust must be denied; every immoral practice, for which your heart may at any time smite you, must be reformed; and if ever you expect to reap mercy and life, you must, as the prophet expresses it, *Break up your fallow ground, and not sow among thorns**. For *Righteousness has* no *fellowship with unrighteousness*, and *light* no *communion with darkness*†. And you may be assured, that as all sin *grieves the Spirit of God*, and strengthens the heavy fetters which lie upon the soul; so those sins which are committed after these awakenings and convictions, have a peculiar guilt attending them, and *Do* greater *despite to the spirit of grace*‡, in proportion to the degree in which his motions on the soul have been vigorous and warm.

3. "Seek further knowledge," especially from the word and ordinances of God.

The influences of divine grace are not to be considered as a blind impulse; but God's spirit works on the spirit of man, as one rational being on another. The apostle therefore puts the question with great reason, *How shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard*§? And as some knowledge is the foundation on which the Spirit of God ordinarily operates in men's hearts; so in proportion to the degree in which you attain farther light into the scheme of the gospel, and of salvation by Christ, it may be expected you will be more impressed by it. The mention of this is so much the more necessary, as mistaken notions of religion often expose people, on the one hand, to great perplexities, and on the other, betray them into a false peace, which one way or another will be bitterness in the end.—Come therefore to the house of God, and attend spiritual preaching. The question is not about forms, but things. Be not therefore over scrupulous about what is merely circumstan-

* Jer. iv. 3. Hos. x. 12. † 2 Cor. vi. 14. ‡ Heb. x. 29. § Rom. x. 14.

tial in religion, on the one hand, or the other: But where you find most spiritual light and improvement, there choose generally to attend; not confining religion to any particular party, nor judging those who differ from you in their sentiment or practice; but calmly and humbly seeking your own edification, leaving others to seek theirs where they are persuaded in the sight of God they may most probably find it.—Above all, remember in this circumstance to make the word of God the man of your counsel*, and to judge of what you read and hear by the tenor of that, as the oracle of eternal truth; always attending the reading of it with earnest prayer to God for the illumination of his spirit, as I shall afterward more particularly direct.—No other books are to be set up in opposition to this, or in comparison with it; yet let it be your care, in subordination to scripture, to study the writings of those faithful servants of God in latter ages, who themselves manifest a sense of practical religion. Especially endeavour to find out and peruse those writings which treat of conversion and regeneration, and which contain advice suited to your case. Blessed be God our language abounds with such; and every truly christian minister will be glad to direct you to them, and so far as he has a convenient opportunity, to furnish you with them.

4. "Pour out your soul before God in earnest prayer."

You cannot be unacquainted with the many promises God has made in scripture for the encouragement of those who desire to pray to him in the sincerity of their hearts. You know into how little a compass Christ has crowded together three equivalent promises; *Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you*†: And you cannot but remember the threefold encouragement, from the success of those who have recourse to this expedient, which he has added in the most express and general terms: *For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened*‡. Go therefore in a cheerful dependance upon his promise: Go, and try the truth of it.——Whither should a creature in such circumstances go, but to that God, who has *The hearts* of all *in his hand as the rivers of water*, and *turns them whithersoever he will*§? And who should go to him, rather than you?——And in what circumstances should a distressed creature rather think of looking and crying to him, than in these; where it sees itself surrounded

* Psal. cxix. 24. † Mat. vii. 7. ‡ Ver. 8. § Prov. xxi. 1.

with so much danger, and yet feels an inward earnest desire, not only of deliverance, but of holiness too?—Go therefore, and cast yourself at the feet of God this very evening; do it as soon as you return to your habitations: and if you cannot put your thoughts and desires into words, at least sigh and groan before the Lord. Mourn, if you cannot pray; and mourn that you cannot; or rather be assured that unutterable groanings have sometimes the greatest efficacy, and prove the most prevailing eloquence.

It will be no wonder at all, if in these circumstances Satan should endeavour to terrify you. It is his common practice. So many souls have vanquished him upon their knees, that he dreads and hates the posture: But draw an argument from that very opposition to make you so much the more eager and importunate; and *When your heart is overwhelmed* within you, fly *unto the rock that is higher than you**.

I will add, be not discouraged, though help be not immediately imparted. Though you may seem to be *Cast out of* God's *sight*, yet *look again towards* his *holy temple*† : Though you seem to *Cry* from the deeps, and almost *from the belly of hell*‡, the bowels of a heavenly Father will yearn over you as returning prodigals; and I doubt not you will meet with the reception that *Ephraim* found, when God saw him *bemoaning* and humbling *himself*, because he had been *as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke;* when he cried, *turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God;* his heavenly Father answers him in these most affectionate words; attend to them, O thou returning sinner, for thy comfort in this hour of distress! *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him,* and *I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord*§.

5. I would advise you farther, that you "immediately communicate the state of your case to some experienced Christian."

I know there is a backwardness in persons of your circumstances to do it; and it has been surprizing to me to learn from the converse of some, who in this respect have afterwards grown wiser, how long they have been pining away in their sorrows before they could be persuaded to consult their ministers or christian friends. It is a stratagem of Satan, against which I would by all means caution you. And one would think your

* Psal. lxi. 2. † Jonah ii. 4. ‡ Ver. 2. § Jer. xxxi. 18, 20.

own reason should suggest some very obvious advantages, attending the method I propose, of opening your case freely to those, whom you think to be more experienced in these things. The impression may be revived upon your own souls, even by the account you give them: And their advice may be exceeding useful to you to guard you against the wiles of the enemy which they have known, though hitherto you are strangers to them; and to guide you into such methods, as, by the divine blessing, may farther promote that good work which seems in any measure to have been begun within you. You may also depend upon it that it will engage their prayers for you; which in this case may have great prevalency. And it will also naturally lead them to inspect your conduct; and if they see you afterwards in danger of being drawn aside, they may remind you of the hopes once entertained, and the impressions once made upon your mind.——In this respect you may hope, that by *Walking with wise men* you *will be* yet *wiser**: and will soon find how happy an exchange you make, when you give up your vain, and perhaps wicked companions, that you may become the *Companion of them that fear God, and that keep his precepts*†; and may have your *Delight in them*, who in the judgment of God *are the excellent of the earth*‡, however they may be despised and derided by men."

6. I would also advise, that you "endeavour to search out those, if there be any such about or near you, who are much in your own circumstances."

Observe, especially among young people, whether there are any that seem of late to have grown more serious than ordinary; and particularly more constant in attending the ordinances of God, and more cautious in venturing on occasions and temptations to sin: And if you can discover such, endeavour to form an acquaintance with them. Try by proper hints how far their circumstances resemble yours; and as you find encouragement, enter into a stricter friendship with them, founded on religion, and intended to promote it in each others hearts. Associate yourselves in little bands for christian converse and prayer; and by this means you will quicken, and strengthen the hearts of each other. For on the one hand, what they tell you of their own experience, will much confirm you in a persuasion that what you find in yourselves is not a mere fancy, but is really a divine work begun

* Prov. xiii. 20. † Psal. cxix. 63. ‡ Psal. xvi. 3.

on your hearts, and will give you encouragement to pursue it as such; for *As face answers to face in water, so* does *the heart of man to man* :* And on the other hand, the observation of your pious zeal will quicken others, and may occasion the revival of religion in the hearts of elder christians; as, I bless God, I have found some things of this kind have done, and hope, and through the divine blessing expect, to find it more and more. Therefore *Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin†, Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees‡ :* And be assured, that while you are endeavouring to help others, you will find in yourselves the first-fruits of this happy attempt: and while you *Water* others, you *will be watered also* yourselves§.

7. It is an advice of the highest importance, that whoever you are, you should immediately fly to Christ, and repose the confidence of your souls upon him."

Observe that I urge you, whoever you are, to fly immediately to Christ: And this I do, to guard against a strange notion which some are ready to entertain, as if we were to bring something of our own righteousness and obedience to him to render us worthy of being accepted by him. But this is a grand mistake. The blessings of the gospel are not to be considered as matter of bargain and sale: No, if we *Come* to *buy wine and milk*, it must be *without money and without price*‖ : and *Whoever will take of the water of life*, must do it *freely*¶. If he pretend to offer an equivalent, he forfeits his share in the invitation; and must be made to know, that the price he offers is a great affront to the value of the blessings for which he would thus barter.——Let this then be your language, "Lord, I have undone myself, and in me is no help: I see nothing in myself which makes me worthy of thy regard; but this I know, that *Where sin* has *abounded, grace does much more abound*, and *reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ** ;* through whom, thou hast assured me in thy word, that *Eternal life is the gift of God††*. As such let me receive it: and by how much the more undeserving I have been, by so much the more will I celebrate the riches of thy grace in making me a vessel of mercy, and a monument of love throughout all eternity.—Blessed Jesus, thou hast said, that *Him who comes unto thee,*

* Prov. xxvii. 19. † Heb. iii. 13. ‡ Isai. xxxv. 3. § Prov. xi. 25.
‖ Isai. lv. 1. ¶ Rev. xxii. 17. ** Rom. v. 20, 21. †† Rom. vi. 23.

thou wilt in no wise cast out :* Behold, I come, and cast myself at thy feet ; receive me, and *Put me among the children†*, though I deserve not the very *Crumbs that fall from thy table‡*."

You will not, I hope, imagine that when I give such advice as this, I mean to insinuate that a person purposing to continue in his sins may nevertheless come, and receive the blessings of the gospel : For that would be no other than in the grossest manner to pervert, and contradict the whole tenor of it. But this I say, and repeat it, that when once a sinner finds himself, by divine grace, disposed to turn from his sins to God, and made willing to accept the mercy tendered in the gospel, of which a deliverance from sin, and a renovation of nature, are a great, important, and essential part ; he may with cheerfulness apply himself to the great Redeemer, as one of those whom he came on purpose to deliver ; and in proportion to the degree in which he can discern the sincerity of his sentiments, he may open his heart to comfort, how great soever his former unworthiness has been, and how lately soever such impressions may have been made upon his heart.

8. Make the dedication of yourselves to Christ, and his service, as solemn a thing as you can."

We read in the Acts of some that *Were baptized, and* publicly *received into the church the* very *same day* in which they were converted § : And though a change of circumstances may at present render it convenient to defer doing it for some time, with the solemnity of the ordinance of the Lord's supper, which is peculiarly intended for that purpose ; because it is proper, that the efficacy of your repentance and conversion should first of all be so far seen, as in the judgment of charity to approve the sincerity of it : Yet I think, when you feel your hearts absolutely *determined for God*, you should in a solemn manner *lay hold of his covenant*, in secret at least, as soon as possible ; and declare, as before him that *searcheth* all *hearts*, the sincerity of that acceptance.—Some have recommended the doing this in a written engagement ; and there are several very affecting forms of this kind in books on this subject, which may very profitably be used. But I hope the fulness of your heart will dictate something of this kind, if such helps should be wanting, or if any peculiar consideration should prevent their being used.—And surely if you feel the love of the blessed Jesus glowing in your hearts as you ought, you will need no other engagement

* John vi. 37. † Jer. iii. 19. ‡ Mat. xv. 27. § Acts ii. 41, 47.

to yield yourselves to him: That love will be instead of ten thousand arguments; and you will see a secret charm in the view of serving him, which will engage your very soul to spring forward with vigour and eagerness to every proper instance of it. The dread of future punishment has certainly its use, to restrain from the commission of sin, especially in an hour of pressing temptation; and the hope of that exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which the gospel promises, will have a greater efficacy upon a generous mind: Yet I will venture to say, that a heart powerfully impressed with the love of Jesus will have a yet stronger influence than either of these. Cordial friendship needs not to be hired to perform its proper office. Love is *a law to itself.* It adds a delightful relish to every attempt for the service of its object: And it is most evidently thus in the present case. "Lord," will the christian say, "wilt thou do me the honour to accept any feeble attempt for thy service, which I can form? I thank thee for it; and bow my head before thee in the most grateful acknowledgments, that thou favourest me with an ability to discharge, in any degree, the fulness of my grateful heart in presenting them: Oh that my whole soul might daily rise before thee, as an acceptable sacrifice, in the flame of love! Oh that I might always feel *My heart enlarged,* to *run the way of thy commandments*!* Were the degree of my future happiness from this moment invariably fixed, I would still pursue this delightful business; for there is no other, in which my soul could find a pleasure equal or comparable to it." If you feel such thoughts as these rising in your mind, breathe them out before the throne from day to day: And when you have done it, recollect frequently the *Vows* of *God* that *are upon* you†; and see, that *Having sworn,* you *perform it*‡, and maintain in the whole of your lives a conduct agreeable to such a profession as this.

9. *Gird up the loins of your mind,* to encounter with a great deal of difficulty in your christian course."

Many are the difficulties that you must expect; great, and possibly for a while increasing difficulties. It is commonly said indeed, that those difficulties which attend the entrance on a religious life, are the greatest; and in themselves considered, no doubt but they are so: They arise from many quarters, and unite all together in the same design of keeping you from a believing application to Christ, and a resolute closure with him.

* Psal. cxix. 32. † Psal. lvi. 12. ‡ Psal. cxix. 106.

In this respect, evil sometimes arises to *A man* in *his own house* *; and those, whose near relation should rather engage them to give the young convert the best assistance, where his most important interests are concerned, are on the contrary ready to lay a stumbling-block in his way, and perhaps act as if they had rather he should have no religion at all, than change a few circumstances in the outward profession of it. Worldly interest too is perhaps to be sacrificed; and conscience cannot be preserved without giving up the friendship of those, whom, at any other expence but conscience, a man would gladly oblige. And it is no wonder, if Satan make his utmost efforts, and those very unwearied too, that he may prevent the revolt of these subjects, or rather the escape of his prisoners. The Christian is therefore called upon by the apostle to arm himself as for a combat, and that at all points; to *Put on the whole armour of God, that* he *may be able to withstand in the evil day; and having done all, to stand* †.

Nor must you, my friends, though as soon as you have *Put on* your *harness* you gain some important victory, *boast* as if you might securely *put it off* ‡. Your whole life must be a series of exercise. *Through* much opposition, as well as *much tribulation*, you *must enter into the kingdom of God* §: And though your difficulties may generally be greatest at first, yet your encouragements then may perhaps be so peculiarly great, and your spirits under their first religious impressions so warm, that other difficulties, in themselves smaller, may press more sensibly upon you. Endeavour therefore to keep yourselves in a prepared posture: Put on a steady resolution; and to support it, *Sit down and count the cost, lest having begun to build* you shamefully desist, *and* be *not able to finish it* ‖; or *having put* your *hand to the plough*, you should *look back*, and become *unfit for the kingdom of God* ¶. And therefore,

10. "Let every step in this attempt be taken with a deep sense of your own weakness, and a humble dependance upon divine grace to be communicated to you as the matter requires."

Recollect seriously what I was telling you in a former discourse, of the necessity of the divine agency and inter-

* Mat. x. 35, 36. ‡ Ephes. vi. 11, 13. ‡ 1 Kings xx. 11. § Acts xiv. 22.
‖ Luke xiv. 28—30. ¶ Luke ix. 62.

position; and remember, it depends upon God, not only to *Begin the good work*, but also to carry it on, and *perform it until the day of Jesus Christ**. If we *Trust* in our *own hearts*, especially after this solemn admonition, this plain instruction, added to such frequent experience, we *are fools* indeed†. Let us therefore *Trust in the Lord, and not lean to* our *own understanding*‡. And do you, my friends, who have but just listed yourselves in this holy war, every one of you say, with an humble yet cheerful heart, *In the name of our God will we set up our banners*§. And if thus you *Wait on the Lord*, you *shall renew* your *strength*; and even the feeblest soul shall be enabled by divine grace to *mount up with wings as eagles*, and to press on from one degree of religious improvement to another, while *The youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall*‖. The apostle expresses, in the liveliest manner, his dependance on the divine Redeemer to communicate this grace in a proper degree, when he says, *Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*¶; plainly implying, that it may be obtained, if we have but hearts to seek for it; which, as on the one hand it effectually takes off all idle excuses for the neglect of our duty, pleaded from our own acknowledged weakness any further than we are supported by the divine power; so on the other hand it animates the heart, that sensible of its various infirmities, desires nevertheless go forth to the work of God, and to consecrate all its faculties to his service; using them such as they are for God, and humbly seeking from him the enlargement of them.

Go therefore, my friends, into the divine presence; and while under a sense of this, be not discouraged, though mountains of opposition may lie in your way. Those *Mountains shall be made low*, and spread themselves into a *plain* before you**; while you go forth under the influences of the spirit of *The Lord*, who *is able to make all grace abound* to his people††.—Of this Paul in our text was a most celebrated instance, who not only received, as was here promised, directions what he should do, but had strength also given him to perform it; a *Strength* which was *made perfect* and illustrious *in* his *weakness*‡‡: And when, in consequence of this,

* Phil. i. 6. † Prov. xxviii. 26. ‡ Prov. iii. 5. § Psal. xx. 5.
‖ Isai. xl. 30, 31. ¶ Heb. iv. 16. ** Isai. xl. 4. †† 2 Cor. ix. 8.
‡‡ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

he had attained to very distinguishing improvements in religion, and had been enabled to act up in the most honourable manner, not only to the christian character in general, but to that of a minister and an apostle, he acknowledges in all his *Abundant labours*, that it was *not he, but the grace of God that was with him**.

If it be thus with you, my brethren, you will be *Established and built up in your most holy faith* †. The most agreeable hopes we form concerning you, when we see you under such serious impressions as this discourse supposes, will be answered; and they who have spoken to you the word of God, on such occasions as these, will have the pleasure to think that they *Have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain.*‡.

And now, if these directions, which I have offered to you with great plainness and freedom, but with the sincerest desire of your edification and establishment in religion, be seriously pursued, I shall have the satisfaction of thinking, that though I might find you in the number of the unregenerate when I began these lectures, I shall carry you on along with me through the only head that yet remains to be handled; and shall indeed address myself to you, as those who *Were sometimes darkness, but are now light in the Lord* §, when I proceed to address those who have been renewed by divine grace, which I promised as my last general, and with which shall conclude my discourses on this important subject.

* 1 Cor. xv. 10. † Col. ii. 7. Jude, ver. 20. ‡ Phil. ii. 16. § Eph. v. 8.

SERMON X.

ON REGENERATION.

An Address to the Regenerate, founded on the preceding Discourses.

James i. 18.——*Of his own Will begat he us with the Word of Truth, that we should be a kind of First-Fruits of his Creatures.*

I INTEND the words which I have now been reading, only as an introduction to that address to the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, with which I am now to conclude these lectures; and therefore shall not enter into any critical discussion, either of them, or of the context. I hope, God has made the series of these discourses in some measure useful to those, for whose service they were immediately intended: But if they have not been so to all, and if with relation to many I have laboured in vain from sabbath to sabbath, I cannot be surprised at it. What *Am I better than my Fathers* *? It has in every age been their complaint, that they *Have stretched out* their *hands all the day to a disobedient and gain-saying people* †; that *The bellows* have been *burnt*, and *the lead consumed of the fire*, but the dross has *not been taken away:* Such *reprobate silver* have multitudes been found ‡. Yea, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who spake with such unequalled eloquence, with such divine energy, yet met with multitudes, who were like *The deaf adder*, that would *not hearken to the voice of the* wisest *charmer* §: And surely *The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord* ‖.

When indeed we consider the infinite importance of the message we address to you, O ye perishing sinners, we hardly know how to give over, or to take a denial. We feel a strong impulse on our hearts to give *Line upon line*, and *precept upon precept* ¶: As a physician that loves his patient, when he sees the distemper prevailing, and has run through the whole

* 1 Kings xix. 4. † Isa. lxv. 2. Rom. x. 21. ‡ Jer. vi. 29, 30.
§ Psal. lviii. 4, 5. ‖ Matt. x. 24. ¶ Isa. xxviii. 10, 13.

range of medicines, is ready, while life yet remains, not entirely to give over, but to repeat again what he had prescribed unsuccessfully before. And if God spares our lives, no doubt many of those things which I have before been urging, must in substance be repeated. But at present I will desist: I know not what more, or farther, to say: And if you are utterly unimpressed with what I have already laid before you, especially with regard to the character of the unregenerate,—the nature of regeneration,—the absolute necessity of it;—and of the divine agency in producing it;—I know not what further to urge, and must leave you either to the grace, or the judgment of God. The time will certainly come, when you will all see, and own the importance of these things. The word of God will, in one sense or another, take hold of every soul that hears it, and perhaps on some of you, in a very terrible manner, and in a very little time. But if it do, I may say with the apostle Paul, when in token of the solemnity with which he spoke, *He shook his raiment*, and took leave of his obstinate hearers, *I am clean from your blood**; and since you refuse to be instructed, I turn to those who will regard what I say. And thus, according to the method I at first proposed, I proceed,

Seventhly, To conclude these discourses with an address to those, who, by divine grace, are experimentally acquainted with this great work of regeneration; to shew them how they ought to be affected with the consideration of the truths that have been offered, and what improvement they should make of such a course of sermons as you have lately been attending.

Out of a general regard to the glory of God, and the good of souls, you have attended on what has hitherto been spoken to persons of a very different character; and I hope not altogether without some sensible refreshment and advantage: But now hear more immediately for yourselves, and suffer a word of exhortation in such particulars as these,—Be thankful to God for what you have experienced:—Improve it as an engagement to behave in a suitable manner:—Study to promote the work of God upon the hearts of others:—And long for that blessed world, where the change that is now begun, and is gradually advancing in your souls, shall be universal and complete.—Your own wisdom and piety have, no doubt, prevented me in each of these particulars; but you will be glad to enter

* Acts xviii. 6.

more fully into the reflection, than you could do while it was intermingling itself with other thoughts.

[1.] " Return the most affectionate acknowledgments of praise to the God of all mercy, for the experience you have had of a regenerating change."

I would now address this exhortation and charge to every one of you, who through divine grace hope you can say, that you are *born again;* to all who can say, that God has *of his own will begotten* you *with the word of truth, that* you may *be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.* To you I would say, *Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness* and goodness *. *Give thanks to the Father, who has made* you *meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light* †. Join your voices, and your hearts, in the most cheerful hymns of praise, whatever your different circumstances are. Let the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the honourable and the mean, rejoice together; if any may be called poor who are thus enriched; if any may be accounted mean, who are thus honoured. *Bless the Lord at all times,* let *his praise continually be in* your *mouths* ‡; and endeavour to carry along with you, through the darkest road you travel, and the bitterest sorrows you taste, cheerfulness in your hearts, and praise on your tongues; considering—how important the blessing is, with which the Lord has favoured you;—how few there are who partake of it;—and in the midst of how much opposition, the divine grace has taken hold of your souls, and wrought its wonders of love there.

1. Consider, my christian friends, " how important this favour is, which God has bestowed upon you," in thus *begetting* you, as *a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.*

Justly indeed may I say, *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should* be regenerated by his grace, and so *be called,* and that with propriety, *the sons of God* §! Justly may I say to you, now you are assembled in the courts of the Lord, in those emphatical words of David, *Oh come let us worship, and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker* ‖: For *It is he that has made us, and not we ourselves,* with regard to this second, as well as the first creation; and *we,* in consequence of it, *are* in the noblest

* Psal. xxx. 4. † Col. i. 12. ‡ Psal. xxxiv. 1.
§ 1 John iii. 1. ‖ Psal. xcv. 6.

sense *his people, and the sheep of his pasture*. *Enter* therefore *into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and bless his name* *.

My brethren, it is a favour in which the salvation of your souls is concerned; and can that be small? Or ought it ever to be thought of but with the highest emotion, and enlargedness of heart? The gracious purposes of God towards his children are, to make every one of them *Higher than the kings of the earth*†, to give them more solid satisfaction than crowns and kingdoms can afford, and at length to raise them to a diadem of immortal glory. Oh what reason have you, with the apostle, to say, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*, even *to* the hope of *an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation* ‡! Survey this great privilege which God has already given you, this high security, these glorious hopes. Has he not brought the beginning of glory already into your souls? Has he not wrought you to a filial temper, and taught you to *Cry Abba, Father* §? Has he not, in some measure, formed and fashioned your minds to a meetness to dwell with angels and perfected spirits in heaven? So that you can now say, even with relation to that which you already feel, that *You are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God* ‖. You *Are* even *now the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what you shall be* ¶; but there is enough *appears*, and enough *known*, at present, of *what you shall be*, and of what *you are*, to revive, to delight, to transport the heart.

And is not this too, O thou afflicted soul, who art called to encounter with the most painful difficulties, enough to be the means of thy support, and to afford thee matter for thy *strong consolation*? You that are *Tossed with tempests* **, and obliged to struggle under various and long continued burdens, have you not here a joy that the world can neither bestow nor impair, a pleasure in public and in secret duties, and a *Hope* which is *as the anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast, entering into that within the veil* ††, and so enabling you to outride these storms and tempests? How glorious does your lot appear, when viewed in the light of scripture? You are ex-

* Psal. c. 3, 4. † Psal. lxxxix. 27. ‡ 1 Pet. i. 3—5. § Gal. iv. 6.
‖ Eph. ii. 19. ¶ 1 John iii. 2. ** Isa. liv. 11. †† Heb. vi. 19.

pressly told, *All things are yours*: The Lord will give grace and glory*, and *no good thing will he withhold from* you †: *All the paths of the Lord, are mercy and truth* to you ‡; and ere long you shall see how they are so. You have a sight by faith of the inheritance appointed for his children; but he does not intend merely a distant prospect for you: *You shall go* in, *and possess that good land* §, and shall ere long *Be absent from the body, and present with the Lord* ‖: Yea, the Lord Jesus Christ ere long *Shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe* ¶, to be glorified and admired, in and by you in particular; when bearing the image of your heavenly Father, you shall rise far beyond this earth and all its vain anxieties, and vainer amusements, to dwell for ever in his presence. And what is there in this world, that you imagine you want, which is by any means to be compared with these enjoyments and hopes? Surely, Sirs, in such a view, you should be much more than content; and should feel your inward admiration, love, and joy, bursting the bonds of silence, and tuning your voices, that have been broken by sighs, into the most cheerful and exalted anthems of praise: Especially when you consider,

2. "How few there are that partake of this important favour, which God has extended to you."

I hope, I need not, after all I have said, remind you at large, that I intend not by any means to speak, as excluding those of different forms and different experiences; as if, in consequence of that diversity, they had *Neither part nor lot in this matter* **. I hope that many, who are not so ready, as it were to be wished, to receive one another, are nevertheless in this respect *Received by Christ to the glory of God* ††. Yet the temper and conduct of the generality of mankind, even under a christian profession, too plainly shews, that they have the marks of eternal ruin upon them: And one can form no hope concerning them, consistent with the tenor of the whole word of God, any other than this, that possibly they may hereafter be changed into something contrary to what they are, and in that change be happy.

Now that you are not left among the wide extended ruins of mankind, but are set *as pillars in the building of God*, is what you have been taught by the preceding discourses to

* 1 Cor. iii. 21. † Psal. lxxxiv. 11. ‡ Psal. xxv. 10. § Deut. iv. 22.
‖ 2 Cor. v. 8. ¶ 2 Thess. i. 10. ** Acts viii. 21. †† Rom. xv. 7.

refer to the grace of God, which has taken and polished you to the form you now bear: Or, as the evangelist expresses it, in language more suitable to the subject before us, *The power*, or privilege, *to become the Sons of God*, is what *he gives to as many as receive him*; and it is manifest as to your regeneration, that you are *born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God**: For *We love him, because he first loved us*†; and whatsoever our attainments be, there is no true believer but will be ready, with the apostle Paul, to say, *By the grace of God, I am what I am*‡.

And now when these two thoughts are taken in this comparison with each other, how deeply should they impress our minds! and how should it excite us to the most lively gratitude, to consider, that when so many of our fellow-creatures perish, even under the sound of the gospel; that when they live and die under the power of a corrupt and degenerate nature, despising all the means which God has given them of becoming better, and turning them into the occasion of greater mischief; God should graciously incline our hearts to a wiser and better choice! It is indeed a melancholy reflection, that the number of those who are made wise to salvation should be so small; yet it is an endearing circumstance in the divine goodness to us, that when it is so small, we should be included in it: As no doubt it would appear to every truly religious person in the ark, that when but eight souls were saved from the deluge, he should be one.—— *There is now a remnant*, says the apostle, *according to the election of grace*§: To that grace therefore should we render the praise. We have indeed *chosen him*; but it is in consequence of his *choosing us*‖. We have said, *The Lord is my portion;* but let us remember to *bless* him, that he *has given* us that *counsel*¶, in consequence of which we have been inclined to do it. Again,

3. Consider, "in the midst of how much opposition the grace of God has laid hold on your souls, and wrought its wonders of love there."

Christians, look into your own hearts; yea, look back upon your own lives, and see, whether many of you have not reason to say, with the great apostle, *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief***: *And* yet *to me, who am less*

* John i. 12, 13. † 1 John iv. 19. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 10. § Rom. xi. 5.
‖ John xv. 16. ¶ Psal. xvi. 5, 7. ** 1 Tim. i. 15.

*than the least of all saints, is this grace given**, that I should be a regenerate adopted child of God, begotten to an inheritance of eternal glory.

"Oh," may one christian say, "How obstinately did I strive against my own happiness! like a poor creature, that having received some dangerous wound, and being delirious with a fever attending it, struggles with the hand that is stretched out to heal him. How did I draw back from the yoke of God! How did I trifle with convictions, and put them off from one time to another! So that God might most righteously have awakened any heart rather than mine. He admonished me by his word, and by his providence: He sent afflictions; he wrought out deliverances for me; and yet I went on to *harden my heart*, as if I had been afflicted, and *Delivered*, that I might *work* greater *abominations*†; till *The Lord being merciful* to me, *laid hold upon* me, and drew me out of Sodom‡."

And here another christian will be ready to say within himself, "If the grace of God wrought sooner upon me, when my soul was more pliant, when my heart was comparatively tender, in infancy or childhood, or in early youth; yet what ungrateful returns have I since made for his mercy! How defective have I been in those fruits of holiness, which might reasonably have been expected from me, who have so long a time been *Planted in the house of the Lord!* Alas for me! that I have *flourished* no more *in the courts of* my *God* §. How often have I forgotten and forsaken him! how cold and negligent has my spirit been! how inconstant my walk, how indolent my behaviour, for these many years that have passed since I was first brought into his family! How little have I done in his service, in proportion to the advantages I have enjoyed! All this he foresaw; all the instances in which my *Goodness* would be *as a morning cloud, and as the early dew*‖; all the instances in which this perverse heart of mine, so prone to backslide, should *Turn aside*, and start back from him, *like a deceitful bow* ¶: And yet he has mercy upon me, I know not why: I cannot pretend to account for it any otherwise than by saying, *Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight***: *Thou hast mercy on whom thou wilt have mercy, and thou hast compassion on whom thou wilt have compassion*††. I have revolted deeply from thee again and again; yet thou sufferest me not to be lost to this very day, nor wilt thou ever suffer it: *Thou restorest my soul; thou leadest me in the paths of*

* Eph. iii. 8. † Jer. vii. 10. ‡ Gen. xix. 16. § Psal. xcii. 13.
‖ Hos. vi. 4. ¶ Psal. lxxviii. 57. ** Mat. xi. 26. †† Rom. ix. 15.

*righteousness for thy name's sake**. *Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue to this day* †: And *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;* and unworthy as I am so much as to enter into thine house below, *I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever* above‡. Thus, Lord, thou makest me, as it were, a wonder to myself; and I hope to express my admiration and my gratitude throughout eternal ages: And if I can vie with the rest of thy redeemed ones in nothing else, I will at least do it in bowing low before thy throne, and acknowledging that I am of the number of the most unworthy, in whom my Lord has been pleased to glorify the riches of his mercy, and the freedom of his grace."

In the mean time, Christians, I call you often to entertain yourselves with such views as these, often to excite your hearts by such lively considerations: I call you, in the name of your Father and your Saviour, to a whole life of gratitude and praise. And this leads me to add,

[2.] " Improve those experiences you have had of divine grace, as an engagement to behave in a suitable manner."

Remember the lively admonition of the text, that you were *begotten by him* for this very purpose, *that you should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.* See therefore that you be entirely consecrated to him, and behave as becomes *The children of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,* being not only *harmless and blameless among* them, but *shining as lights in the world, and holding forth that word of life* §, by which he has begotten you to himself, *And quickened you when* you *were dead in trespasses and sins* ‖. God has now brought you into a most honourable relation: He may therefore well expect more, much more from you, than from others. He has *Made* you *priests* to himself ¶, and you are therefore *To offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ***. *You were* once *darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk* therefore *as children of light* ††. Remember, *You are not your own* ‡‡; your time, your possessions, and all your capacities for service, are the property of your heavenly Father.——And permit me to remind you, that if you desire to see this doctrine of regeneration prevail, you, who pretend to be experimentally acquainted with it, must take great care that your behaviour may not only be

* Psal. xxiii. 3. † Acts xxvi. 22. ‡ Psal. xxiii. 6. § Phil. ii. 15, 16. ‖ Eph. ii. 1, 5.
¶ Rev. i. 6. ** 1 Pet. ii. 5. †† Eph. v. 8. ‡‡ 1 Cor. vi. 19.

innocent, but exemplary: Otherwise many will be ready *to blaspheme* the holy name of that God *, whom you call your Father; and you are like to bring a reproach upon *the household of faith*, which probably you will never be able to roll away.

Christians, the dignity of our birth and our hopes is too little considered and regarded; and the reason why the world thinks so meanly of it, is because we ourselves are so insensible of its excellency. Did we apprehend it more, we should surely be more solicitous to *Walk worthy of* that *calling wherewith we are called* †, that *high* and *holy calling*. Let me therefore exhort you, to endeavour to loosen your affections more from these entanglements of time and sense, which so much debase our minds, and dishonour our lives. *Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead* ‡: Employ, with a growing zeal, to the honour of God, that renewed life which he has given you: *Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds* §: And let your conversation and behaviour be like those, who feel the *Constraining* influences of divine *love* ‖; who are, not in form, but in reality, devoted to God; and who would be continually *Waiting for* his *salvation* ¶, with that temper, in which you could most desire that salvation to find you when it comes.

[3.] Let those who have experienced the power of divine grace themselves, "study to promote the work of God upon the hearts of others."

Labour, as much as possible, to spread this temper which God has wrought in your hearts; for you cannot but know, that with it you spread true happiness, which alone is to be found in that intercourse with the great Author of our being, for which this lays a foundation, and in the regular exercise of those powers which are thus sanctified. No sooner was Paul converted himself, but he presently set himself to bring others to Christ, and to *Preach the faith which once he destroyed* **. And David speaks of it as the effect of God's pardoning love to him, *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee* ††.

If therefore God has called us to the office of the ministry, as the experience of this change on our own hearts will be our best qualification for our public work, (and indeed such a qualification that nothing else can supply the want of it;) so it will

* 2 Sam. xii. 14. † Eph. iv. 1. ‡ Rom. vi. 13. § Rom. xii. 2.
‖ 2 Cor. v. 14. ¶ Gen. xlix. 18. ** Gal. i. 23. †† Psal. li. 13.

surely excite us in a very powerful manner, to apply vigorously to this care. *That which we have* not only *heard*, but *seen with our eyes*, and *looked upon, and handled of the word of life*, let us, *declare* to others; *that* their *fellowship also may be with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ* *. Let us declare it in our public discourses, and never be ashamed to bear our testimony to that grace to which we are so much indebted, to that *Grace by which we are what we are* †. Let us warn every man, and teach every man the absolute necessity of regeneration; and expose the vanity of all those hopes which are built upon any fair outside, on any moral decency of behaviour, on any humane turn of temper, on any warm flight of imagination or emotion of passions, while the soul continues unrenewed and unsanctified. Let us endeavour to *Save* men *with fear, pulling them out of the fire* ‡, which, if they are yet unregenerate, is just ready to kindle upon them. And let us be often reviewing our respective flocks, that we may see who they are, concerning whom there is reason to entertain this fear; that proper applications may be made to them in private, as well as in public; that joining our admonitions to our sermons, and our prayers and examples to both, we may at least *Deliver our* own *souls*, if we cannot deliver theirs §. But in proportion to the degree that such a Spirit prevails in us, there is very great encouragement to hope it will be propagated to them, and that our *Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord* ‖.

And let me beseech you, my beloved hearers in other stations of life, that you would not imagine the work is so entirely ours, that you have nothing to do with it. Are we alone redeemed by the blood of the Son of God? Are we alone renewed and sanctified by his grace? Are we alone the brethren and friends of mankind, that the generous care and endeavour to promote their eternal happiness should be entirely devolved upon us? We wish so well to the world, and permit us to say, we wish so well to you, to your own religious consolation and establishment, to your comfortable account, to your eternal reward, that we cannot but earnestly exhort you all, even as many as *Have tasted that the Lord is gracious* ¶, that in this respect you join, not only, as I trust you do, your prayers with ours, but that you also join your endeavours.

Let me particularly address this exhortation to those of you, who bear any distinguished office in the society, to whom

* 1 John i. 1, 3. † 1 Cor. xv. 10. ‡ Jude, ver. 23.
§ Ezek. xxxiii. 9. ‖ 1 Cor. xv. 58. ¶ 1 Pet. ii. 3.

therefore its religious interests are dear by additional ties. Let me address those of you, whose age and experience, in the human and the divine life, give you something of a natural authority in your application, and command a distinguished regard. Look round about you, and observe the state of religion in your neighbourhood; and labour to the utmost to propagate, not so much this or that particular opinion or form of worship, but real vital christianity in the world. Bear your testimony to it on all proper occasions: Be not ashamed of it in your familiar discourse: And above all, labour to adorn it by your actions. And when you see any under serious impressions, as it is certain they will have a great deal discouraging and difficult to break through; and as the Devil and his instruments, among whom I must necessarily reckon licentious company, will be doing their utmost to draw them back into *the snare of the fowler;* let me exhort and charge you to be as solicitous to save, as others are to destroy. I know, how many excuses our cowardly and indolent hearts are ready to find out upon such an occasion; but I think those words of Solomon are a sufficient answer to all, and I beg you would seriously revolve them; *If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart, consider it? And he that keepeth thy soul,* (thine, Oh Christian, with such peculiar and gracious care) *doth not he know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works*?* He will assuredly *Remember,* and will abundantly reward, every *work of faith, and* every *labour of love* †; and we are insensible of our own truest interest, if we do not see how much it is concerned here.

Let me especially leave this exhortation with you, who are parents and heads of families. And one would imagine, there should need but little importunity in such a case as this: One would think your own hearts should speak to you, upon such an occasion, in very pathetic language. Look upon your dear children, to whom you have conveyed a nature which you know to be degenerate and corrupt; and be earnest in your prayers before God, and your endeavours with them, that it may be renewed. And take care, that you do not in this sense *Despise the* soul *of your man-servant, or of your maid-servant* ‡. God has brought them under your care, it may be in those years of life, in which, on the one hand, they are most capable of being

* Prov. xxiv. 11, 12. † 1 Thess. i. 3. Heb. vi. 10. ‡ Job xxxi. 13.

instructed and seriously impressed; and in which, on the other hand, they are also most in danger of being corrupted. Perhaps their relation to you, and abode with you, is the most advantageous circumstance, which may occur in their whole lives: See therefore that you seize it with a holy eagerness; and amidst all the charges you give them relating to your own business, neglect not that of the *One thing needful**; and labour heartily to bring them to the honour and happiness, which is common to all God's servants, and peculiar to them alone.

Let me conclude this part of my address with entreating you all to express your concern for the souls of others, by your importunate prayers to God for them. Pray for the success of gospel ordinances; and for a blessing on the labours of all God's faithful servants throughout our whole land, of one or another denomination in religion. Yea, pray that throughout the whole world, God would *Revive his work in the midst of the years* †; that the religion of his Son, by which so many souls have been regenerated, refined, and saved, may be universally propagated; and that all who are vigorously engaged in so important, though so self-denying a work, may find that *The hand of the Lord is with them*, and so multitudes *believe and turn unto the Lord* ‡; so that his *Sons may be brought from far, and his daughters from the ends of the earth* §; that the *Barren* may *rejoice*, and she *that did not travail with child*, may *break forth into singing, and cry aloud*; that *the children* of nations now strangers to Christ, may be *more than of those* that are already espoused to him ‖. And then,

[4.] Let all that are *born again* "long for that blessed world, where the work of God shall be completed, and we shall appear with a dignity and glory becoming his children."

As for God, *His work is perfect* ¶; and the time, the happy time is approaching, when we shall know, and the whole world shall know, in another manner than we now do, what our heavenly Father has intended for us in begetting us to himself. —Whatever our attainments here may be, *We know* at present but *in part* **; and with whatever integrity of soul we now walk before God, we are sanctified but in part: And hereupon we find, and must expect to find, *The flesh* striving *against the Spirit*, as well as *the Spirit against the flesh; so that*, in many respects, *we cannot do the things that we would* ††: And in pro-

* Luke x. 42. † Hab. iii. 2. ‡ Acts xi. 21. § Isai. xliii. 6.
‖ Isai. liv. 1. Gal. iv. 27. ¶ Deut. xxxii. 4. ** 1 Cor. xiii. 9. †† Gal. v. 17.

portion to the degree in which our nature is refined and brightened, we are more sensible of the evil of these corruptions that remain within us; so that though we are not, in a strict propriety of speech, *Carnal*, and *sold under sin*, but do indeed, *delight in the law of God after the inward man* *, yet in the humility of our hearts we are often borrowing that pathetic complaint, *Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death* †?—But let it be remembered, Christians, as the matter of your joy, that the struggle shall not be perpetual, that it shall not indeed be long. *Look up* with pleasure then, *and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh* ‡: The time is approaching, *When that which is perfect shall come*, and *that which is in part shall be done away* §. You are now *the children of God*; but *it does not appear* to every eye that you are so: *The world knows us not* ‖, nor are we to wonder at it; for even Christ our Lord was once unknown, and appeared in so much meanness, and so much calamity, that an undiscerning and carnal eye could not have discovered who and what he was. But there is a day appointed for *The manifestation of the sons of God* ¶, as the apostle Paul most happily expresses it; when he will manifest them to each other, and manifest them also to the whole world. They shall not always live thus at a distance from their Father's house, and under those dispensations of providence that look so much like disregard and neglect: But he will take them home, and gather them to himself. Ere long, Christians, he will call these heaven-born spirits of yours, that are now aspiring towards him, to dwell in his immediate presence: He will receive you to himself; and you shall *Stand* where *no sinner* shall have a place *in the congregation of the righteous* **, and shall have *an inheritance among the saints in light*, the saints in holiness and glory.—Oh happy day! when dropping this body in the grave, we shall ascend pure and joyful spirits to that triumphant assembly, where there is not one vitiated affection, not one foolish thought to be found among the thousands and ten thousands of God's Israel! Oh blessed period of a regenerate state! Though all the schemes of the divine love were to rest here, and these bodies were for ever to be laid aside, and utterly to be lost in the grave; the rejoicing soul might say, "Lord, it is enough!" And it might be indeed enough for us; but it is not enough to answer the gracious purposes of God's paternal love. God will shew in the most conspi-

* Rom. vii. 14, 22. † Ver. 24. ‡ Luke xxi. 28. § 1 Cor. xiii. 10.
‖ 1 John iii. 1, 2. ¶ Rom. viii. 19. ** Psal. i. 5.

cuous manner, what a family he has raised to himself among the children of men; and therefore he will assemble them all in their complete persons, and will do it with solemn pomp and magnificent parade. He will for this purpose send his own *Son, with all his holy angels* *, and will cause the bodies of millions of his children, that have long dwelt in the dust, to spring out of it at once in forms of beauty and lustre, worthy their relation to him. This therefore is with beautiful propriety called by the apostle, *The adoption, even the redemption of our body* †; alluding to the public ceremony with which adoptions among the ancients were solemnly confirmed and declared, after they had been more privately transacted between the parties immediately concerned.

Oh Christians, how reasonable is it, that our souls should be rising with a secret ardour towards this blessed hope, this glorious abode!—It is pleasant for the children of God to meet, and converse with one another upon earth; so pleasant, that I wonder they do not more frequently form themselves into little societies, in which, under that character, they should join their discourses and their prayers.—It is delightful to address to those, that, we trust, through grace are born of God. No discourses are more pleasant than those that suit them: And could we that are the ministers of Christ reasonably hope, that we had none but such to attend our labours, we should joyfully confine our discourses to such subjects.—Yet while we are here, we see imperfections in others; we feel them yet more painfully in ourselves: And as there is no pure unmixed society, no fellowship on earth that is completely holy and without blemish, so there is now no pure delight, no perfect pleasure to be met with here.——Oh when shall I depart from this mixed society, and reach that state, where all is good, all glorious! Where I shall see my heavenly Father, and all my brethren in the Lord; and shall behold them all for ever acting up to their character! All *Giving thanks to the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light* ‡! All for ever blessing and serving the great Redeemer; and without one ungenerous action, one reflecting word, one suspicious thought, for ever serving each other in love, rejoicing in each other's happiness, and with the most prudent and stedfast application for ever studying and labouring to improve it!

With the most earnest desire that you, my dear brethren and friends, may at length attain to this state of perfection and

* Mat. xxv. 31. † Rom. viii. 23. ‡ Col. i. 12.

glory: and with a cheerful expectation, through divine grace, that I shall ere long meet many of you in it; I close this sermon, and these discourses: Not without an humble hope, that when we arrive at this blessed world, these hours which we have spent together in the house of God in attending them, will come into a pleasant remembrance; and that the God of all grace, to whose glory they are faithfully devoted, and to whose blessing they are humbly committed, will honour them as the means of increasing his family, as well as of feeding and quickening those who are already his regenerate children. Amen!

THE

SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE

OF

SALVATION BY GRACE

THROUGH FAITH,

ILLUSTRATED AND IMPROVED, IN TWO SERMONS.

I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST; FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION, TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH.—*Rom.* i. 16.

TO THE

CHURCH AND CONGREGATION

OF

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS

AT ROWELL,

TO WHOM THE SUBSTANCE OF THESE SERMONS WAS PREACHED, AND AT WHOSE DESIRE THEY ARE PUBLISHED.

My Dear Brethren and Friends, beloved in our common Lord,

WHEN I first preached these plain sermons to my own congregation, which I here offer to your perusal, I was much surprised at the request which several of them made, that they might be printed: But I was yet more surprised, when, after having delivered the substance of them in one discourse at Rowell some time after, you so unanimously and affectionately made that request your own. I apprehended, that though the many excellent treatises we have on this subject already, might excuse my backwardness to comply with the first motion of this kind; yet absolutely to have refused your repeated solicitation might have appeared disrespectful to my good friends, and perhaps have looked like some unwillingness to bear my testimony to this great and important doctrine, in an age, in which the credit of many evangelical truths seems to be fallen very low.

I am really sorry I have delayed this little service so long; but it was chiefly owing to my desire of finishing my Sermons on Regeneration, which indeed cost me more labour than I at first apprehended. That seemed a business of such importance, that I knew not how to interrupt it: But as they are now almost printed off, I send out these discourses as a kind of supplement to them; and therefore they are printed in a form very fit to bind up with them. The delay is more excusable, as *salvation by grace* is not a subject which grows out of date in a few months. This glorious doctrine has been the joy of the church in all ages on earth; and it will be the song of all that have received it in truth throughout the ages of eternity, and be pursued in the heavenly regions with evergrowing admiration and delight.

I cannot conclude this short address, without congratulating you on the abundant goodness of God to you as a church, in bringing among you that worthy and excellent person*, under whose pastoral care you are now so happily placed. I know he is a faithful witness to the truths of the gospel, and rejoice in that rich abundance of gifts and graces which render him so fit to state and improve them in the most advantageous, as well as most agree-

* The Rev. Mr. Jonathan Saunderson.

able and delightful manner. I hope and believe, that the grace he so humbly owns his dependance upon, will add happy success to his labours : And I heartily pray, that you and neighbouring churches may long be happy in him: and that God, who has by such various and gracious interpositions in your favour, expressed his paternal care of you, may still delight to dwell among you. May he multiply you with *men like a flock, daily adding to his church* among you *such as shall be saved!* May your souls continually rejoice in his salvation! And may you ever walk worthy of the Lord, and prove, by the integrity and purity, the spirituality and usefulness of your whole behaviour, that this *grace of God which brings salvation* has entered with power into your hearts; and that it is your care and delight to improve it, as well as to hear of it! To contribute to this blessed end, by this or any other attempt of cordial love and faithful respect, will be an unspeakable pleasure to,

My dear Friends,

Your very affectionate Servant

In the bonds of our common Lord,

P. DODDRIDGE.

Northampton, Sept. 1, 1741.

SERMONS ON GRACE AND FAITH.

SERMON I.

On Salvation by Grace.

Ephes. ii. 8.—*For by Grace are ye saved, through Faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the Gift of God.*

YOU are often, my dear brethren and friends, hearing of the duties of a religious life: And it cannot but be a pleasure to every faithful minister of Christ to observe, how willing, nay, how glad you are to hear of them; and with respect to many of you, how ready you are to practise them. But I am now coming to you with a renewed admonition on another head, which is always to be taken in connection with the former; and which, I persuade myself, will in that view be welcome to you all. I am to inculcate it upon you, that when you have *Done* your utmost, how much soever that be, you should still *say*, that you *are unprofitable servants**: and endeavour to maintain a deep sense of it upon your hearts, that, as the apostle admonishes the believing Ephesians in the words of the text, *by grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*

The apostle, in his preceding discourse, speaks of the happy change which the gospel had made in the state of these poor Heathens. He freely acknowledges on this occasion, that the Jews were likewise in a very bad state, and if not entirely sunk into the same enormities, yet *Were by nature children of wrath even as others*†. So that on the whole, both *Were* (as it might be expressed by an easy and very proper figure) *dead in trespasses and sins*‡, indisposed for any religious sensations and actions, and far more odious to God than a putrid carcase is to men. But he adds, that God by his grace had saved them; that his unmerited goodness had begun their salvation, and having thus far carried it on, would undoubtedly complete it: And

* Luke xvii. 10. † Eph. ii. 3. ‡ Ver. 1, 5.

that he might impress their minds the more deeply with it, he repeats it again, *by grace ye are saved.* So much was the apostle Paul concerned to inculcate a doctrine which some are ready to look upon as unnecessary, and others perhaps as dangerous. But the apostle's authority is abundantly enough to outweigh all that can be laid in the opposite scale. And it will appear from what I have further to offer, that if it had not in this view so direct a sanction from his express testimony, the conclusion would follow by the justest deduction of argument from principles so fundamental to the gospel, that they cannot be denied without subverting its whole superstructure.

And here, if I would treat the subject in its full extent, I might consider what we mean by gospel salvation: But I content myself at present with telling you in a few words, that it implies "a deliverance from that ruinous and calamitous condition into which, by our apostacy from God, we are fallen;" and it also includes "our being restored to the divine favour, and all the happy effects of it, as extending not only to time but to eternity."

I might also consider at large the nature of that faith to which the promises of salvation are made. But that is a subject you have heard so frequently explained, that I shall only remind you of that general account of it which has often been illustrated among you. "Saving faith," for of that we are now speaking, "is such a persuasion, that Christ is the great Messiah, the Son of God, and the Saviour of men; and such a desire and expectation of the blessings he has procured under that character; as shall engage us cheerfully to commit our souls to him in his appointed method of salvation, with a disposition cordially to devote ourselves to his service in all the ways of holy and evangelical obedience." The several branches of this definition are to be taken in their connection with each other; and then there would be no difficulty in shewing from the whole tenor of scripture, that as nothing short of this can be acceptable to God, so wherever such a principle really is, the soul in which it is found is entitled to all the blessings of the covenant of grace, and has all the security for eternal happiness which the promise and oath of God can give. I might also easily shew you, that this is such a description of faith, as effectually secures the interest of practical religion, and guards against every presumptuous hope, which may be formed in a soul destitute of a principle of universal holiness.

But, waving the further prosecution of these preliminaries

to our subject, which we have occasion so often to dilate upon, I shall make it my present business,

I. To consider how we may be said to be *saved through faith.*

II. How it appears, that in consequence of this, we are *saved by grace.*

III. I shall examine the force of the apostle's additional argument which is drawn from the consideration, that *faith is the gift of God.* And then,

IV. I shall collect some inferences from the whole. And may God *write on* your *hearts*, as *with the point of a diamond*, them and the premises on which they are founded!

I. We are to consider in what sense it may be said, that christians are *saved through faith.*

Ye are, says the apostle, [σεσωσμενοι] *the saved ones*,—the persons who have already received the beginnings of salvation, and the certain pledge of its complete accomplishment,—— [δια της πιστεως] *through*, or *by means of*, *faith.*

Now I apprehend we shall take in the full sense of the apostle's assertion, and of all that it is most necessary to believe and know on this subject; if we acknowledge and remember—that faith is absolutely necessary in order to our salvation, so that we cannot possibly be saved without it;—and also, that every one who hath this faith shall undoubtedly obtain salvation. —But yet, that after all, a christian is not to ascribe his salvation to the merit of his faith, but entirely to that of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great *author and finisher* of it. These are three very obvious remarks: None is so weak but he may easily understand them; and yet I speak very seriously, when I say they seem to me to contain the sum of all that is most important in the many large volumes which have been written on the subject.

1. "Faith is so absolutely necessary to our salvation, that we cannot possibly be saved without it."

So our Lord tells us, in the most express and emphatical forms of speech: *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins* *: which most certainly implies the loss of salvation, and indeed much more. And elsewhere the incarnate wisdom

* John viii. 24.

and truth of God saith, *He that believeth not, shall be damned* *. *He shall not,* as the baptist says, *see life* † : Nay, as our Lord himself expresses it in the strongest terms, *He that believeth not, is condemned already* ; not only on account of all those other sins for which *the wrath of God,* to which he became immediately obnoxious, still *abideth upon him* ; but for this additional reason of dreadful provocation, *Because he hath not believed in the* venerable and majestic *name of the only-begotten son of God* ‡.

Without this faith, there is no knowledge that will save a man, though it should be the most various, and the most exact knowledge of the most divine and important subjects, which ever entered into a human mind. So far is it from this, that one need not scruple to say, a man might as reasonably expect to be saved by skill in the mathematics, or in music, as by skill in polemical divinity, though it were in its most essential branches, if after all it were no more than mere speculation.

And it is no less certain, that without this faith, morality will not save a man, be it ever so unexceptionable, be it ever so exemplary. This is indeed much better than the former ; but if there be nothing more, it will be fatally ineffectual to the great purpose which we have now in view. I speak not now, as you may easily imagine, of such a continual and uniform obedience to the divine will, as perfectly answers the demands of God's original law ; for no man ever has attained to this, or will ever in fact attain to it in this world : But I speak of what the world generally calls morality, a freedom from gross impiety and scandalous vice, yea, though attended with the practice of the humane and social virtues. This is indeed amiable and honourable so far as it goes ; and will undoubtedly have its reward, in the pleasure of such a conduct, in the esteem and love of mankind, and in the possession of many temporal advantages and blessings, which in the common course of providence are connected with it. But alas ! it is after all a very partial and imperfect thing : And as a man may be temperate in himself ; just, faithful, and benevolent to men ; without having any appearance of religion towards God, or making any pretence to it : So he may have some sense of God upon his spirit, which one would think none but an atheist could entirely avoid, while for the neglect, or it may be the rejection of the gospel, he stands exposed to its sentence of condemnation. If Christ be not regarded as the rock on which we build our hopes, the foundation is sandy, and will be ruinous ; and if we do not receive

* Mark xvi. 16. † John iii. 36. ‡ John iii. 18.

Christ by such a faith as I described above, we offer him a most insolent affront, by pretending to put our unsanctified and rebellious hearts under his patronage.

We see then, that without this faith we cannot possibly be saved. It is the counterpart of this important truth, which we now add, when we observe,

2. That, "every one who hath this faith, shall undoubtedly be saved."

You will here be sure to observe, that I say, "Every one who hath this faith," meaning the faith described above; which includes in it our devoting ourselves to Christ in the way of holy obedience, as an essential part of it: And consequently there can be no reason to say, as some have wildly represented the matter, "A believer shall be saved, let him live as he will;" which is either a most notorious and mischievous falsehood, or an express contradiction in terms. If the word believer be supposed to signify one who merely assents to the truth of the gospel in speculation, nothing can be more false; and the whole epistle of James, to omit a thousand particular passages of other scriptures, is a demonstration of the contrary: But if it be meant, as I suppose it generally is, of a true believer, it is an express contradiction; and is as absurd as it would be to say a really good man shall be saved, though he should at the same time be a very bad one. For no one can, in the sense described above, which is the scriptural sense, be a true believer, but one who wills to live in a holy manner; since the same operation of God upon the soul, which disposes it to believe, sanctifies the will, and though freely, yet effectually leads it into a prevailing determination to make the service of God the business of life: Or, in other words, it is plain from the whole tenor of scripture, that a saving is also a sanctifying faith; but there cannot be a sanctifying faith in an unholy heart; neither can there be a holy heart, where there is a wicked life; *For the tree is known by its fruits**: And when we speak of the heart, we mean not merely the affections, but the will, the determinations of which are indeed the very actions of which we speak, so far as they are properly ours. There cannot therefore be a more insolent falsehood, than the pretence to holiness of heart, where that of the life is wanting, or to saving faith in the absence of both. There may indeed be an error in the understanding as

* Luke vi. 44.

to some precepts of Christ, or a false judgment as to some circumstance attending ourselves ; and that may produce some error in practice : there may be instances in which the infirmity of human nature, and the surprise or force of a temptation, may betray a man into particular miscarriages, contrary to the general bent and tenor of his heart and life: But there cannot possibly be, in the conduct of any true believer, an habitual, allowed, and customary disobedience to any one commandment of our blessed Redeemer.

This you must first admit as a necessary preliminary ; and when it is admitted, you may very securely build upon it this great truth, that " whosoever hath such a faith as this, shall certainly be saved." Whatever his former guilt may have been, though ever so various, ever so long continued, ever so aggravated ; though crimes had been committed, *From which he could* never have been *justified by the law of Moses* *, but would have been doomed by it to an infamous *Death without mercy* †: Yet on exerting such an act of faith in Christ, the believer immediately stands a justified person before God, previous to any good works of his own: Yea, though he should die before he have an opportunity of performing any, in this case, (which, if ever it happen, is by the way the only case in which good works are not, according to the gospel-covenant, necessary to an actual admission into heaven) an omniscient *God calls the things that are not as if they were* ‡, and accepts those fruits of holiness which he discerned in their root or their bud, though he did not afford time for their coming to maturity. And if life be spared, the believer continuing such, continues in a state of favour and acceptance with God, though there may be remaining imperfections in him ; and though he may see reason to complain, that he cannot do the things which he would, but that the *Law in his members* struggles *against the law of his mind* §, yet he shall finally be saved, whatever difficulties are to be broken through, and how long soever his trials may continue : And his salvation as a believer is as certain, from the whole current of the word of God, as the condemnation of the unbeliever, which we proved above. *He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life* ‖; he hath it already in its beginnings and earnests, and he shall ere long rise to the complete possession of it. For Christ *Gives unto* his sheep

* Acts xiii. 39. † Heb. x. 28. ‡ Rom. iv. 17.
§ Rom. vii. 23. ‖ John iii. 36.

eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand *. But it is of importance that I add,

3. That "after all, a believer is not to ascribe his salvation to the merit and excellency of this faith itself, but entirely to the merit and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the free grace of God, as manifested in it."

We know it is the constant doctrine of the New Testament, that God *Hath made us accepted in the Beloved* †; and that *Of him we are in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption* ‡; So that we are *Justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in him* §. And if we should pretend to say that we are accepted of God for faith, as the meritorious cause of that acceptance, we must contradict the whole course of the apostle Paul's argument, especially in the fourth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, where he strongly contends that *Abraham* was not *justified by works*, because if he were, he would have something *to glory* in *before God* ‖. Now if he had been *justified by faith*, as his own meritorious act, there would have been as much room for him to have gloried in that, as in any work whether of ceremonial or moral obedience.—And in the same epistle he declares again, where he is speaking of the salvation of God's chosen remnant, that *If it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more work* ¶: The meaning of which plainly is, that no man can at once be justified by grace and by works: And on the same principles we may also say, no man can be justified by the merit of faith, and yet by grace. If therefore it evidently appear from the text, and our farther reasoning upon it, that our justification and acceptance with God is to be ascribed to grace, all pretence of merit in the act of believing must of course be given up.

This will indeed farther appear, if we consider what it is that faith does in order to our being justified. You very well know it is represented in scripture, as *receiving Christ. To as many as received him, to them gave he power* (or privilege) *to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his name* **. Now it must be flagrantly absurd to talk of resting upon an act, whereby we do indeed receive and rest upon another. And therefore however inaccurately some may have ex-

* John x. 28. † Eph. i. 6. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 30. § Rom. iii. 24.
‖ Rom. iv. 2. ¶ Rom. xi. 6. ** John i. 12.

pressed themselves on this head, I cannot suppose that any wise and considerate Christian ever meant to assert the contrary to what I am now endeavouring to prove. We do indeed find the apostle speaking of faith as *Imputed for righteousness* *; but it seems to me, that the most natural sense of that expression may be fixed, and the propriety of it may be admitted, upon the principles I have now been laying down.

All manner of imputation seems to be a metaphor taken from books of account between creditor and debtor †. To impute any act of sin, or of obedience, is therefore properly no other than to set it down to his account: The great God of heaven and earth is represented in scripture with humble condescension to our manner of acting and conceiving of things, as keeping a most exact book of records and accounts, in which those things are registered concerning every one of us, which he will bring into that solemn review and survey, by which our characters and states shall finally be determined. And as the most exact and perfect obedience is a debt which we owe him, as our great Creator, Benefactor, and Governor; so on the breach of his law, we owe him some proper satisfaction for it. In this view we are all charged as debtors, poor miserable insolvent debtors, in the book of God: Innumerable sins are imputed, or set down to our account: And were things to go on in this course, we should ere long be arrested by the divine justice, and being found incapable of payment, should be cast into the prison of hell, to come out no more. But God, in pity to this, our calamitous state, *has found* out a surety, and *a ransom for us*, and has provided a satisfaction, in the obedience and sufferings of his Son; which is what we mean by *the righteousness of Christ*, or his active and passive obedience. It is with a gracious regard to this, to express his high complacency in it, and, if I may so speak, his pleasing remembrance of it, that all who are finally justified and saved, meet with divine acceptance and favour: Or to pursue the metaphor opened above, *the righteousness of Christ* is in the book of God *imputed* or set down to their account, as that by which the debt is balanced, and they are entitled to such favours as righteous persons might expect from God. But then, it is an invariable rule in the divine proceedings, that this righteousness, or this

* Rom. iv. 22.

† From mercantile affairs, the metaphor is sometimes applied to judicial; as crimes to be accounted for are also sometimes called debts: But when the matter is well understood in one view, it is easy to apply it to the other.

atonement and satisfaction of Christ, (for I think it matters but little by which of these names it shall be called) be a means of delivering those, and only those that believe. Pursuant therefore to the aforesaid metaphor, when any particular person believes, this is set down to his account, as a most important article, or as a memorandum, if I may so express it, in the book of God's remembrance, that such a one is now actually become a believer, and therefore is now entitled to justification and life by Christ. In this sense his *faith is imputed for righteousness.* Yet it is not regarded by God as the grand consideration which balances the account, or indeed as paying any of the former debt, which it is impossible it should; but only as that, which, according to the gracious constitution of the gospel, gives a man a claim to that which Christ has paid, and which God has graciously allowed as a valuable consideration, in regard to which he may honourably pardon and accept all who shall apply to him in his appointed way, or in the way of humble believing, as faith was described above.

This appears to me a just and easy view of the gospel doctrine on this head; and it is so important distinctly to understand it, that I hope you will excuse my having represented it in so many words. And this is, on the whole, the sense in which we may be said to be *saved through faith.*—None can be saved without it;—and every one who has it, is entitled to salvation; but not in virtue of the merit and excellency of faith itself, but entirely for the sake of what Christ has done and suffered; or in other words, by the imputation of his perfect righteousness, the merit of which is graciously applied to this or that particular person upon his believing: So that upon this he is justified; and by the general tenor of the gospel is to be looked on as a righteous person; or as one who shall on the whole be treated as such, and shall ere long be publicly declared righteous before the assembled world, and be freed from all the remainders of that penalty which sin has brought upon us: And though, for wise and good reasons, he be for a while continued under some of them, the time of that continuance is so short, and his succeeding happiness so lasting, that the former being as it were swallowed up by the latter in the all-comprehending views of God, he is spoken of by him as if his justification and salvation were already complete. *Ye are saved through faith.*—But having stated this, the method I proposed leads me,

II. To shew, that in consequence of our being thus *saved through faith*, we may properly be said to be *saved by grace.*

Now the connection between these will appear very evident; if we consider,—that faith cannot make any atonement to the offended justice of God, so as to give us any legal claim even to the pardon of our sins upon the account of it:—Much less can it confer any obligation upon God to bestow on us eternal blessedness:—Nor would there indeed have been any room to mention faith in this whole affair, if God had not contrived such a method of salvation, and done that to effect it, which none but himself could have done.

1. "Faith cannot make any atonement to the offended justice of God, so as to give us any legal claim even to the pardon of our sins upon the account of it;" so that if we *are saved through faith*, we must in this view acknowledge it to be *by grace*.

The law of so wise, so great, and so venerable a sovereign as the blessed God is, must of course suppose some awful sanctions, some solemn denunciations of wrath and vengeance on those who presumptuously transgress it. And it is certainly the part of God, as a wise, holy, and gracious legislator, to maintain its honour when it has been violated, and not to treat an offending creature as innocent and righteous, without some provision made for the satisfaction of his injured justice: In the demand of which satisfaction God does not express any thing of a sanguinary and revengeful disposition: Far be so blasphemous a thought from us! But he displays a steady regard to that order, which as the great Sovereign it becomes him, for the benefit of his subjects, as well as for the glory of his own name and government, to preserve in the moral world, i. e. among his reasonable creatures. Some ample and honourable amends must therefore be made, in order to the discharge of a guilty and condemned criminal. And is faith such an amends? Take it in its utmost extent, as an assent to whatever he proposes, and a submission to whatever he demands, to the very utmost of our capacity, this in our present circumstances is but our duty, and would have been so had we never offended him: And the performance of it, with whatever readiness, exactness, and constancy, cannot possibly atone for the violation of it in times past; as the payment of what for the future becomes due to any creditor, cannot discharge a debt formerly contracted, and remaining unbalanced upon account: Therefore it is, that we read of Christ's being *Made a sin-offering for us*, though he himself *knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in*

him *; i. e. that we might be accepted of God as righteous, being considered as by faith united to him, and interested in his righteousness and grace. In testimony of which, God expressly requires, that every sinner should sue out his pardon *In Christ's name* †, and should present himself before him as one that *Has* obtained *redemption through Christ's blood*, and is *accepted in the beloved* ‡, *Who of God is made unto us righteousness* §; A scheme utterly inconsistent with that of our being justified and saved by any merit or excellence in faith, considered as an act of atonement made by us, by which the guilt of our offences is cancelled, and our pardon bought by us. It is yet more apparent,

2. That "Faith can confer no obligation upon God to bestow on us eternal blessedness;" in which view also our salvation through it must appear to be *by grace.*

That eternal blessedness is designed for every believing soul, is, through the divine goodness, as apparent, as that faith itself is ever required in scripture. But can we say of eternal life, that it is the wages of faith? I much question, whether it could have been claimed as wages due to us on account of our obedience, had that obedience been perfect in its kind and degree: Nor do I think it could with any confidence have been expected, unless God had been pleased by a gracious covenant to promise it: Otherwise, all that the completest obedience could have claimed, would only have been favour continued, or at most favour increasing, during the time in which we continued to behave ourselves well. Much less then can we imagine, that when we had once broken the law of God, faith, though for the future attended with the most perfect efficacy, and productive of the most steady course of obedience in all after-instances, could give us any such claim. Least of all then can we have any room to pretend it, on account of a faith which operates in so imperfect a manner, and produces an holiness so sadly defective in many instances, as we must acknowledge our own to be. That we should be admitted into the glorious presence of God, and be fixed in a state of immutable security and felicity, where sin and sorrow shall no more invade us, but where *God will appoint* for us *salvation* itself *for walls and bulwarks* ‖, is so glorious a triumph of the divine goodness; that the soul which knows itself, and attentively looks on this *far more exceeding and eternal*

* 2 Cor. v. 21. † Luke xxiv. 47. ‡ Ephes. i. 6, 7. § 1 Cor. i. 30. ‖ Isai. xxvi. 1.

weight of glory, is astonished and humbled in the views of it, and finds it no small stretch of faith, to be able to believe, that God does indeed intend it for so sinful a creature: So far is the believer from arrogating any thing of this kind to himself, as if his own faith had any degree of merit or excellence proportionable to it. But we must observe once more, to complete the argument,

3. That "there had been no room to mention faith at all in this affair, had not God graciously contrived such a method of salvation, and done that to effect it, which none but himself could do."

Faith receives our Lord Jesus Christ; it is its great office, and its great glory to do it. But how could it have received him, unless he had been given? And how could he have been given in this view, but by the appointment of the Father, in concurrence with his own free and most gracious consent?—Faith apprehends and submits to the gospel plan of salvation by the obedience and sufferings of the Son of God; yea, it not only submits to it, but rejoices and glories in it. But who could have exhibited, who could have contrived, who could have executed such a plan, unless it had been formed and determined in the counsels of eternal love?—Admit faith to be ever so voluntary, and so far as is possible to a creature, ever so independent an act, can we any of us say, that there was so much merit and excellency in that act, or in any of its subsequent fruits, that God upon the foresight of it should say, "These creatures, guilty and condemned as they appear, will be so ready to receive the intimations of my will, that they will fully deserve that I should save them at any rate; they will deserve even that my Son should become incarnate, and die as a sacrifice, to make way for their happiness." Can any of you, Sirs, imagine this to have been the case? Or can you hear it even supposed, without finding something shocking in the very representation of it? The blessed Paul, I am sure, had very different views, when he said God *Hath predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us acceptable in the beloved**. And the apostle John had other notions of it, when he said, full as his gracious heart was of the most lively sentiments of gratitude and zeal, *Herein is love, not*

* Ephes. i. 5, 6.

that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins *.

These arguments would prove, that our *salvation through faith* is *by grace*, even though it could not be added, that this faith *is the gift of God.* How much more convincing then must the conclusion be, when that consideration is added to the rest!

But as the illustration of this, which was the third general we mentioned, will require more time than can properly be allowed to the remainder of this discourse, I will reserve it to another; and conclude, for the present, with exhorting you seriously to examine, whether you have this principle of faith in your hearts, without which your salvation is in present circumstances an impossible thing, and with which it is inviolably secure.

It is a melancholy, but most obvious truth, that *All men have not faith* †. There are thousands and ten thousands under the gospel, with regard to whom its ministers have reason to complain, *Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed* ‡? On whom has its power been so exerted, as to conquer the natural incredulity and obstinacy of their hearts? Are you, Sirs, of that number, or of the number of those, who, as the scripture expresses it, *Have believed through grace* §? It is the question on which your eternal state will turn at last; and therefore you would do well to examine it now. And I would beseech you to endeavour to trace it—in its production—and in its effects—or, in other words, to enquire—how it has been introduced into your minds—and how it has wrought there.—You may surely discover it, in the one or in the other, if it be your prevailing character; and I hope many of you will be able to discover it in both.

(1.) Can you trace faith "in its production and advance in your souls?"

Do you recollect any time in which you had no thoughts of the Lord Jesus Christ, and no workings of affection towards him? And has there been any alteration in your minds in this respect? All true faith in Christ is founded on a conviction of sin, and of the misery to which you are exposed by it. Have you indeed been brought to this conviction? Have you heard, and, if I may be allowed the expression, have you felt yourselves condemned by the sentence of a righteous, a holy, yea, of a merciful God? And have you, by that apprehension,

* 1 John iv. 10. † 2 Thess. iii. 2. ‡ Isa. liii. 1. § Acts xviii. 27.

been stirred up to cry for pardon and deliverance? You have heard of Christ under the character of a Saviour; but I put it to your consciences, have you seriously viewed him under that character? And from a full persuasion of his correspondency, when considered in this view, to all the necessities of your case, and all the exigencies of your souls, have you entered into any treaty with him? Recollect it seriously. Have you ever presented yourselves before God, with an humble and cordial regard to Christ? And do you know what it is secretly and sincerely to repose your souls upon the merit of his obedience, and the efficacy of his blood, with humble acknowledgment of your own guilt, with entire resignation of your own righteousness, as utterly unworthy of being mentioned before God, and with a cordial and joyful resolution to devote yourselves to his service as long as you have any being, and through time and eternity to testify your gratitude by a constant series of obedience?

If you can trace such a process of thought and experience as this, you have great reason to conclude, that you experimentally know what faith is; and that *through faith* you are in the way to salvation. Yet it is always to be remembered, that *Faith* is to be *shewn by* its *works**. Give me leave therefore farther to enquire,

(2.) Whether you can trace "the genuine effects of it in your hearts and lives?"

You believe in Christ: But has that faith in him produced a continued and habitual intercourse with him? I speak not of an intercourse absolutely uninterrupted; for that, the present state of human life will not admit. But has it produced frequently repeated and direct acts of application to him, and converse with him? One can hardly imagine how it is possible for a true believer, to suffer these to be long, and often intermitted; especially to such a degree, that days and weeks and months should pass, as if the business between Christ and his soul were quite finished, and he and his Lord were parted by consent, till death, or some very urgent and extraordinary circumstance, renewed the interviews between them.—I would ask farther, Has this faith to which you pretend, produced a resemblance to Christ's example, and an obedience to his precepts, in the course of your lives? You know that true faith is operative; and you know, in the general, the genius and design of christianity. I would demand of your consciences how far you comply with it?

* James ii. 18.

Is your temper and conduct in the main such, as you well know, our Lord intended, that the temper and conduct of his people should be? Is it devout and spiritual, just and charitable, sober and temperate, humble and cautious? Is religion your care, and do you maintain an habitual watchfulness over yourselves, that your behaviour may be agreeable and honourable to your profession?—Once more, Are you ardently pursuing greater attainments in the christian temper and life, so that you may be spoken of as *Hungering and thirsting after righteousness** ?

If you can answer such enquiries as these in the affirmative, you have a great deal of reason to hope that faith is yours, and salvation is yours. But if you cannot so answer them, a confident assurance that you shall be saved is so far from being faith, that it is presumption and folly; and far from being any security to you, will only prove adding sin to sin. That confidence, by whatever name you may affect to call it, is indeed unbelief: Unbelief of God's threatenings, while it vainly pretends to trust his promises: For he hath not more expressly said, that *He who believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life;* than he has added, that *he who is disobedient to the Son*†, *shall not see life*‡. While sin reigns in your life, and thereby appears to *reign in your heart*, did you pretend a revelation from heaven as to the truth of your faith, every wise man would conclude that pretended revelation was a delusion; and that how solemnly soever it might be ascribed to *the spirit of truth and holiness*, it really proceeded from *the father of lies*.

Excuse the plainness with which fidelity to God, and to you, obliges me to speak on this head; and be assured, that it proceeds from a real concern to secure the honour of that glorious doctrine of *salvation by grace*, which I have now been labouring to establish, and the demonstration and improvement of which I shall farther pursue in the ensuing discourse.

* Mat. v. 6. † Ο απειθων τω υιω. ‡ John iii. 36.

SERMON II.

ON GRACE AND FAITH.

Faith is the Gift of God.

Ephes. ii. 8.—*For by Grace are ye saved, through Faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the Gift of God.*

IN the works of nature, many of those things, which to a superficial eye may appear as defects, will on a careful enquiry be found to be marks of consummate wisdom, and kind contrivance. And on the same principle, I confess, I have often thought, there is reason to be thankful for the very inaccuracies of scripture. The haste in which the apostle Paul was, by the multiplicity of his affairs, obliged to write, has given us an opportunity of viewing more of his heart in his epistles, than we might perhaps have seen, if he had frequently reviewed and corrected them. Those parentheses, in particular, and those repetitions, which render the style less elegant, and the sense sometimes less conspicuous, do nevertheless shew to greater advantage, how deeply those thoughts were impressed upon his mind, which he introduces in such a manner. And of this, the words which I have now been reading are an instance. In the course of his preceding argument, a few verses before, while he is telling the Ephesians, that *God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved* them, *even when* they *were dead in sins, had quickened* them *together with Christ;* he adds, (by way of parenthesis) *by grace ye are saved* *: And when he goes on to say, they were *raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*, he further tells them, that this was with an intention *That in the ages to come, God might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus* †: Nay, his heart was so full of the subject of grace, free and astonishing grace, that as if all this was not enough, by a most glorious and edifying tautology, if I may be allowed so to speak, he inserts the words of my text, *by grace*

* Ver. 4, 5. † Ver. 6, 7.

are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

I have already shewn you, from these words, in what sense we may be said to be *saved through faith*;—And I have also proved, that in consequence of this, it is evident we must be *saved by grace;* since faith being incapable of satisfying the demands of God's injured justice, can much less merit such a recompence as eternal life; nor can it indeed have any efficacy, or any place at all in this affair, otherwise than by God's free constitution and gracious appointment.—I then concluded with observing, that this argument would have a convincing force, even though faith were ever so entirely an act of our own; or that we had no more support or assistance from God in forming and exerting it, than we have in any of the common actions of natural life. But I am now to shew, that even this is not the case; but that a new proof of our being *saved by grace* arises from considering,

III. The argument which the apostle suggests in the close of the text, that even this faith is *not of ourselves;* but *it is the gift of God.*

I am sensible that some endeavour to invalidate and supersede all this part of the argument, by giving another turn to this last clause, referring it in general to our salvation by faith, as if it had been said, "Our being thus *saved by grace, through faith*, as I have just now said, is *not of ourselves*, but *it is the gift of God.*" But I apprehend, that an impartial reader would not be willing to allow of this interpretation; which makes the latter clause a mere repetition of what was said before, and a repetition of it in less proper and expressive words. None could imagine, that our being *saved through faith* was *of ourselves;* or that we ever could ourselves constitute and appoint such a way of salvation, which was indeed fixed so long before we had a being. But faith being really our own act, it was highly pertinent to observe, that the excellency of this act is not to be arrogated to *ourselves*, but is to be ascribed to *God.* All that are acquainted with the genius of the original must acknowledge, this is a construction which it will very fairly admit. And we shall prove, in the process of this argument, that other scriptures expressly declare the truth, which this interpretation makes to be the meaning of the words.

Faith may be called *the gift of God*,—as it is God that reveals the great objects of faith,—that brings the mind to attend to them,—that conquers our natural aversion to the gos-

pel method of salvation, and so implants faith in the soul;—and also as it is he that carries it on to more perfect degrees, and improves its vigour and activity.

1. Faith may be called *the gift of God*, "as it is God, who reveals the great objects of faith."

Human reason is but weak and imperfect, and has indeed interwoven the traces of its own weakness, with many of the fairest monuments of its strength. Even in its most advanced state, among the most learned and polite nations of antiquity, it is deplorably evident, how far it was from discovering the several branches of natural religion in its purity, extent, and order. And to speak freely, it shone more brightly in almost every other view, than in that which is its noblest end; I mean, what relates to God, and immortality. It has indeed produced many admirable poems, and composed many moving orations: It has woven many exquisite threads of argument, with which the subtilest disputants have entangled each other, and have often entangled themselves: And much more useful it has been, in adorning the face of the earth, in subduing the sea, in managing the winds, and meting out the heavens. But this rich vein of knowledge, this mine of holy and divine treasure, lies too deep for human discovery.—If any ask, *Where shall* this *wisdom be found, and where is the place of* this *understanding* *? It must be granted, that it *Is a path, which the vulture's eye hath not seen* †: *Man knoweth not the price thereof, neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth* of human science *says, It is not in me: And the sea*, with all the most improved countries that lie upon it, must *say, it is not with me* ‡: For *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him* §. There were no principles on which to proceed, in the investigation of this important knowledge: None could ever have learned, that God had formed counsels of mercy and peace towards apostate creatures: None could ever, on natural principles, have discovered the very existence of the Son, and the Spirit. How much less then could they have known, or imagined, that the Son of God should have undertaken to redeem us with his own precious blood; and the Spirit be sent to manage affairs, as the great agent of the Redeemer's kingdom; in consequence of whose gracious acts and influences, the soul should be savingly renewed and

* Job xxviii. 12. † Ver. 7. ‡ Ver. 13, 14. § 1 Cor. ii. 9.

transformed, and then carried on with a growing pace in the way to heaven, till it was received to the separate state of holy and triumphant spirits at death, and to complete glory at the resurrection of the dead? All the men upon earth could never, by their own natural sagacity, have discovered any of these particulars; how much less then could the whole system have been discovered?—*But God* himself *has* graciously *revealed them by his Spirit* *: And as he was pleased miraculously to interpose to give this revelation to the world; so he has interposed by remarkable providences to send to us such clear notices of it; and to send these notices so early too, as to throw the prejudice of education among us this way, rather than the contrary. And considering how powerful those prejudices are, and how many have fallen into ruin by them, this will appear no small matter to a considerate person; especially when he surveys the state of the world in general, and considers how few nations and countries there are, in which this is the case; and in what various forms of most pernicious and destructive errors the generality of mankind are trained up from their tenderest infancy.—I would conclude this head with observing, that "whatever particular advantages we have enjoyed, they are all to be traced up to the distinguishing goodness of God to us." If wise and pious parents, if skilful, zealous, and faithful ministers, have been the instruments of working faith in our souls, *This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts* †; who taught their minds to conceive, and their lips to speak, and who opened our hearts to receive instruction. And this leads me to add,

2. That as God reveals the great objects of faith, so "it is he also that inclines the mind to attend to them:" On which account faith may be further said to be *the gift of God.*

The great objects of faith are, and by their nature must be, to us invisible; while those of sense strike so strongly on the mind, that it is no wonder we are apt often to forget the other. And when a man is conscious to himself, that the first recollection and acquaintance with them must be painful, and must be attended with remorse and fear, how necessary soever that pain may be, it is too natural to draw back from it. And we may easily conceive that Satan, the great enemy of men's

* 1 Cor. ii. 10. † Isa. xxviii. 29.

eternal happiness, will exert all his artifices to prejudice them against it and to divert them from it.

Accordingly I make no doubt but that many of you, and especially young persons, have experienced this. You have found, that when you first began to be sensible you were in a lost and miserable state; when you began first to hearken to the tidings of deliverance by Christ, and to enquire into the way of salvation exhibited in the gospel, many circumstances arose to take off your attention from them. You found *Satan* endeavouring to *steal away* the good seed *out of your hearts, lest you should believe and be saved**; and joining the efforts of various of his instruments, to allure, or to terrify you from religion. To what then will you ascribe it, that you have been able to break through all these snares? To what will you ascribe it, that when you had perhaps laboured to stifle convictions in your own hearts, they have returned upon you with greater power than before? And though you have endeavoured all you could to shift them off, yet you have found them every where pursuing you; keeping your eyes from sleep during the watches of the night, or breaking in upon you in the morning with the returning light; or following you perhaps into those scenes of business, or of vain conversation, to which you have fled as a refuge from them? You must undoubtedly ascribe it to the God of the spirits of all flesh, that you have thus been taught to *Consider your ways*†; and that your spirits have been so deeply impressed with concerns, which multitudes, whom the world reckons among the wisest of mankind, are entirely thoughtless about, and which perhaps you yourselves were once among the first to despise.

3. Faith may be further called the gift of God, as "it is he that conquers the natural aversion which there is in men's hearts to the gospel method of salvation, when it comes to be understood and apprehended."

That method is so wise, so rational, and so gracious, that one would imagine every reasonable creature should embrace it with delight. Yet the degenerate heart of man draws its strongest objections against it, from those things which are really its greatest glory.

It is the way of humility, and of holiness: And a haughty and licentious heart rises against it in each of these views. To be stripped of all the pride of human nature, to stand guilty

* Luke viii. 12. † Hag. i. 5.

and helpless before God, and in an entire renunciation of all self-dependance, to seek righteousness and strength in another, is, to spirits naturally so arrogant as ours, a hard saying scarcely to be borne: To give up our own wills to be checked and controled in all things by the divine authority, to engage in an habitual course of self-denial, to *Crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts**, is hard indeed. No wonder therefore, if we are taught in scripture to acknowledge the agency and interposition of a divine hand, when this is wrought in us; when we not only feel some tendency of soul towards it, some transient and ineffectual purpose, but when a permanent principle of this kind is implanted in our hearts, so that our lives are governed by it. Hence the scripture speaks of those to whom *It is given*, not merely to hear *of Christ*, but *to believe in him*†; and pathetically describes *The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe*, as an *energy of mighty power*, like that *which, wrought in Christ, when God raised him from the dead*‡: When he lay a cold corpse in the grave, his blood drained out, and his side pierced to the very heart, think of that mighty energy which then re-animated your Lord; and you see an emblem of that which raises us to a divine life, and enables us to act that life in faith on a crucified and a risen Redeemer. Thus as it is said in one place, that *God gave to the Gentiles repentance unto life*§, it is also said in another, that he *Purified their hearts by faith*‖; plainly implying, that there is in both an interposition of divine power. Now certainly, if he implants this principle in our hearts, that salvation which he has connected with it must be entirely of grace: Which will further appear, if we consider,

4. That "it is God who carries on this blessed work, and maintains this divine principle."

It is *Through much tribulation* and danger, through much opposition and difficulty, that the christian *must enter into the kingdom of God*¶. When he begins to set sail heaven-ward, *the prince of the power of the air* endeavours to raise those storms, which shall, if possible, oblige him to *Make shipwreck of faith, and of a good conscience***: Nevertheless he must *Endure to the end*, or he cannot *be saved*††. And how is he enabled thus to persevere? Surely it is through the continued communications of divine grace to him; or as the apostle with

* Gal. v. 24. † Phil. i. 29. ‡ Eph. i. 19, 20. § Acts xi. 18.
‖ Acts xv. 9. ¶ Acts xiv. 22. ** 1 Tim. i. 19. †† Mat. xxiv. 13.

admirable propriety expresses it, He *Obtains mercy of the Lord to be faithful**. It is by this means that he obtains the victory: And while he *overcomes the world*, and conquers the remaining corruptions of his heart, he must still humbly own, that in the one and the other instance, he is *More than a conqueror through him that loved him*†. In short, he will be ready to acknowledge, that *Having obtained help of God*, he *continues to this day*‡; and will mark out, as it were, the several stages of his journey, by erecting at the end of each, *A stone* of remembrance and thankfulness, and *saying, hitherto the Lord has helped me*§.

And now, my friends, you may see the evidence of this great truth, that *by grace we are saved through faith*, appearing in its complete light: And permit me once more to repeat the summary of the whole argument, that it may be more deeply, and more distinctly, impressed upon your minds.—How much soever faith may be supposed to be our own unassisted act, so far as the act of any creature is unassisted, it could make no atonement to the injured justice of God,—and much less confer any obligation upon him to bestow on us eternal life;—nor had there been any room to mention it at all in the whole affair, if God had not contrived such a method of salvation, and done that to effect it, which none but himself could do:——Much more will it appear to be of grace, when we add, that faith itself is the gift of God,—as he reveals the great objects of it;—as he brings the mind to attend to them;—as he conquers the natural aversion of the heart to the gospel method of salvation;—and carries on the work of faith in the soul, till it ends in complete salvation. It now remains,

IV. That I conclude with some obvious, but useful, inferences from the whole.

And here now, if it is *by grace* that *we are saved through faith*, then certainly we may infer from hence,—that we have *no reason to glory*,—but should be thankful for the *grace by* which *we are saved*;—that we must wholly be *without excuse, if we neglect this* method of *salvation*;—that we should labour therefore that our faith may be increased and strengthened;—that even the weakest have encouragement to seek, and to hope for salvation in this way:—and finally, that we should take great heed that we do not bring a reproach upon this doctrine by an irregular and licentious behaviour.

* 1 Cor. vii. 25. † Rom. viii. 37. ‡ Acts xxvi. 22. § 1 Sam. vii. 12.

1. If *we are saved by grace through faith*, then it is certain that "we have *no reason to glory*."

If it were possible a person should perform the most complete and perfect obedience, and so were justified by works, it is but only in a limited sense he would have *any thing* of which *to glory before God;* since even he must acknowledge, that it is *God who works in him, both to will, and to do* *, and by his gracious influences renders him capable of both: However he, in such a case, may in some measure glory, that he has done his best, and that his behaviour has all that merit, or all that excellence, which the behaviour of a creature in his circumstances could possibly have. But when the *ungodly* are *justified* †, when we who have been transgressors in ten thousand aggravated instances, are *saved by grace through faith*, of what shall we *glory?* Shall any of us *glory* that we are *saved by another*, when even our receiving that other is what God hath brought us to by the renewing and sanctifying influences of his grace upon our hearts? When we had corrupted and undone ourselves, and were under a sentence of condemnation and wrath, we have embraced the gospel, that is, we have accepted the riches of the divine liberality and goodness exhibited in it: But shall a beggar glory in having stretched out his hand to receive an alms? Especially if it were given him by a generous and skilful physician, who before he bestowed that alms, had cured him of a disease, by which that very hand, now stretched out to him, had been benumbed and disabled? Let us rather enter into that just and amiable reasoning of the apostle Paul, and say as he does, *Of him*, i. e. of God, *are we in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:* Let no flesh therefore glory in his presence; but *He that glories let him glory in the Lord* ‡. And this leads me to infer,

2. That we have a great deal of reason to "be thankful, and to adore the *grace by which we are saved.*"

If it is *God who commandeth the light to shine out of darkness*, that *has shined in our hearts, to give* us *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* §, let us bless *The Lord who has shewed us* this *light*, and with a cheerful gratitude let us *bind the sacrifice* as it were *with cords unto the horns of the altar* ‖. Let us *Bless the God and Father*

* Phil. ii. 13. † Rom. iv. 5. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 29—31. § 2 Cor. iv. 6. ‖ Psal. cxviii. 27.

of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort *, *Who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ; according as he has chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love* †. I would call upon you this day to do it; to join with me, and with each other, in it. *Praise the Lord, all ye his saints; be thankful unto him, and bless his name* ‡! Praise him, who graciously purposed your salvation, and *Predestinated* you *to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself* §! Praise him, who rendered this purpose effectual, and wrought it out by a high hand and outstretched arm! Praise him, who *gave his own Son* to be a sacrifice for you, *And to bring in everlasting righteousness* ‖! Praise him, who sent his Spirit, as the great agent in his Son's kingdom, to bring the hearts of sinners to a subjection to the gospel, and gently to captivate them to the obedience of faith! Praise him, who has revealed this glorious gospel to you, at so great a distance of time and place! Praise him, who has impressed your hearts with a disposition to regard it! Praise him, who has subdued your prejudices against it! Praise him, who having implanted faith in your souls, continues even to this day to animate and support it!—Let all ranks and ages join in this cheerful song! Praise ye the Lord, you that are rich in temporal possessions, if you have been enabled to renounce the world as your portion, and to triumph over it by this divine principle! Praise him, you that are poor in this world, if you are *Rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to them that love him* ¶! Praise him, you that are cheerful and vigorous, and capable of rendering him that active service which may speak the gratitude of your hearts towards him! Praise him, you that are weak and languishing, since his *Strength is made perfect in* your *weakness* **, and your infirmities illustrate the force of that faith, which he has wrought in you! Praise him, ye youths, who with this guide and companion of your way, are setting forth in the journey of life with courage, and lifting up your feet in his paths! Praise him, ye aged saints, who stand on the borders of eternity, and live in a daily expectation that you shall *Receive the end of your faith, in the salvation of your souls* ††.—Begin that work now, in which you are all so soon to join! Break forth into one joyful anthem, and sing, "*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy*

*2 Cor. i. 3. † Eph. i. 3, 4. ‡ Psal. c. 4. cxlviii. 14. § Eph. i. 5.
‖ Dan. ix. 24. ¶ Jam. ii. 5. ** 2 Cor. xii. 9. †† 1 Pet. i. 9.

name be * all the praise of that salvation, which thou hast already begun in our souls, and which thy faithfulness has engaged to complete." Again,

3 If we are *saved by grace through faith*, then certainly "they who neglect such a method of salvation, are highly inexcusable."

To be not only delivered from everlasting condemnation and ruin, but raised to the presence and enjoyment of God above, is so glorious an exchange, so important a prize, that it would be worth while to secure it at any imaginable rate, whatever was to be resigned, whatever to be endured, for it. But it is certain, that the more gracious the proposal and offer is, the baser and more criminal will the refusal be. Had some hard matter been proposed, should we not have done it? And how much rather, when the divine oracle only says, *Wash and be clean* †? *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved* ‡.—*To you*, my brethren, even to all that hear me this day, *is the word of this salvation sent*, and brought §. Let me address you, therefore, in the language of the apostle, and say, take heed *That you receive not the grace of God in vain*: And let me add, *behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation* ‖. Dare not to trifle in a business of such consequence; lest if you should neglect it even till to-morrow, there should be no room to repeat that declaration then. That God should ever offer salvation at all, and especially in such a method, is astonishing condescension and love: And every instance in which that offer is renewed, is a renewed miracle of mercy. But the day of the divine patience has its limits: and if you trifle beyond those limits, and *Know not that the goodness and long-suffering of God lead to repentance*, this injured mercy will plead against you, and it will appear you have *treasured up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God* ¶.

4. If we are saved through faith, then surely "we should labour, that this blessed principle may be strengthened in our souls."

The greater evidence we have of the sincerity of our faith, the greater assurance may we justly have of our interest in the gospel salvation; and the stronger our faith is, the clearer will

* Psal. cxv. 1. † 2 Kings v. 13. ‡ Acts xvi. 31.
§ Acts xiii. 26. ‖ 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. ¶ Rom. ii. 4, 5.

the evidence of its truth be. Let us therefore emulate the character of our father Abraham, and make it our care, like him, to be *Strong in faith*, thereby *giving glory to God* *.—To this purpose let me address you, my christian brethren, to be diligent and serious in attending the ordinances of divine institution, and especially that of hearing the word; for as the apostle observes, *Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* †. And it is certain, the better we are acquainted with the word of God, the more shall we trace of its evidence; and it is probable we shall also feel so much the more of its energy, awaking and confirming those internal acts of faith, which it is our duty with increasing vigour daily to renew: And I doubt not but the experience of many that hear me, attests the reasonableness of this address.—Let me also exhort you to seek after greater strength of faith by fervent application to God in prayer; as the disciples that came unto Jesus, *And said, Lord, increase our faith* ‡. Plead, that your faith, in its original, and in its progress, is the work of God; and earnestly intreat that this work may be perfected §.—And to add efficacy to all, labour to the utmost to bring forth the genuine fruits of true faith, in all the branches of a holy temper, and an exemplary life. Thus *Shew* to all that are about you *your faith by your works* ‖; *Walking worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called* ¶, *Worthy of him that has called you to his kingdom and glory* **. For in proportion to the degree with which these fruits appear, it will be evident there is life at the root; and you will find, that as the vigour of our limbs, so also that of our virtues and graces will grow by use and exercise. And in this view let me observe,

5. That if *we are saved by grace through faith*, then "there is encouragement even for the weakest soul, to seek after this gospel salvation, and to hope it shall obtain it."

Give me leave here to address myself to those whose hearts are impressed with their eternal concerns, but then feel their own manifold weakness, and perhaps may be discouraged, as young persons very frequently are, with observing the difficulty of religion. My brethren, if your hopes of justification were *by the works of the law*, whether the ceremonial or the moral law, these discouragements were just: Since were all the sins of your former life forgiven upon your return to God, yet through the in-

* Rom. iv. 20. † Rom. x. 17. ‡ Luke xvii. 5. § 1 Thess. iii. 10.
‖ James ii. 18. ¶ Eph. iv. 1. ** 1 Thess. ii. 12.

firmities of human nature, and the temptations of life, yet would no doubt quickly fall into some new transgression; and this one, even the least, would be sufficient to ruin you, and to bring you into condemnation again. But *the righteousness of faith* speaks an easier and more gracious language, when it says, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved**. You know of whom it was said, *A bruised reed will he not break, and smoaking flax will he not quench*†: Why should you not then enter into a treaty with so mild, so gracious, so compassionate a Saviour! Nay, I will add, Why should you not be saved by him! Are you willing to accept his grace? Methinks, I hear one and another reply, "What do I desire so much as to accept it? Feeble and guilty as I am, I would at least bow as low as any of thy servants, in a thankful acknowledgment of the riches and freedom of thy grace; and I would ascribe my salvation to it in as entire a renunciation of all self-dependance, as any of them all should do." And when I ask, as it is necessary I should ask, Are you also willing to bow to his yoke? I persuade myself there are those of you whose conscience answers, "Lord, I would take it upon me, with a most thankful consent: I desire nothing so much as to serve thee; but I suspect this treacherous and inconstant heart, that is so ready to forsake thee." My brethren, this desire of serving him, if you know what you say when you express it, is the effect of his grace; and it is a comfortable token that *He will give more grace*‡. Set yourselves therefore with a cheerful courage to oppose those difficulties that lie in the way, and to *Work out your own salvation* with hope and joy, as well as *with fear and trembling; for it is God that* even now *is working in you, both to will, and to do, of his good pleasure*§; and you have abundant reason to hope he will *Not forsake the work of his own hands*‖.

6. If the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith be so divine and important as we have heard, then "let us take great heed that we do not bring a reproach upon it by an irregular and licentious behaviour."

Let the holy apostle, who is the great asserter of this doctrine, be heard as the guardian of its honour, when he says, *Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid*¶! You plainly see, that this doctrine, when scripturally

* Acts xvi. 31. † Mat. xii. 20. ‡ James iv. 6. § Phil. ii. 12, 13.
‖ Psal. cxxxviii. 8. ¶ Rom. vi. 1, 2.

explained as above, gives no rational foundation, no, nor even any plausible excuse, for such an inference, however the corruption of men's hearts may take occasion from it. And it would be far more reasonable, and much less detrimental to mankind, to endeavour to root up all the vines in the world, and destroy all the animals intended for food, because wine and flesh are sometimes the occasions and instruments of luxurious riot; than to deny this important doctrine, because it may be perverted to purposes unfriendly to practical religion. But see you to it, my friends, that you, if you are persuaded this is the doctrine of God, behave in such a manner, as to shew that you perceive it to be, what indeed it is, a *Doctrine according to godliness* *. *Woe to that man, by whom*, in this instance, *the offence comes! It had been better for him, that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea* †, than that he should occasion such dishonour to God, and bring such a reproach upon his truths and his ways. And give me leave to say, there is hardly any consideration in the world that should cut deeper into the heart of the truly good man, of one who has *Tasted that the Lord is gracious* ‡, and has *Believed through grace* §, than the reflections of having made such unworthy and ungrateful returns to God, for that singular mercy which he has obtained from him, in the provision which the gospel has made for his salvation, in so gracious, and so endearing a way.

Let me therefore conclude with *Charging you* in the most solemn manner, *before God and the Lord Jesus Christ* ‖, and by the honour of that gospel you so strenuously profess, that you exercise a holy watchfulness over yourselves in this respect. Consider, my brethren, how many eyes are upon you for evil. It is true indeed, that charity, that boasted name, that divine principle, would teach men another lesson: It would teach them to mourn, rather than to triumph over the faults of them that call themselves Christians. But there is very little of that to be found; and on the contrary, a great deal of that carnal, sensual, and diabolical zeal which *Rejoices in iniquity* ¶, and takes the greatest pleasure in the irregularities of those whose failings ought most to be lamented; that is, of those who are most signalized by a christian profession. Remember therefore and consider, my friends, that it would be far better for you to die, than to lay a stumbling block in the way of the

* 1 Tim. vi. 3. † Mat. xviii. 6, 7. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 3. § Acts xviii. 27.
‖ 2 Tim. iv. 1. ¶ 1 Cor. xiii. 6.

souls of men ; and to give them any just cause for representing the gospel as a doctrine of licentiousness; or speaking of *Christ* as *the minister of sin* *.

You solemnly renounce all dependance upon your own righteousness before God ; and in professing to do it, and to expect *salvation by his grace* alone, you do well. But give me leave to say, that if in the mean time you yourselves are found sinners, allowing yourselves habitually in any thing contrary to the divine will, the renunciation of such a righteousness as is consistent with that will be a very unworthy kind of sacrifice before God, and do very little credit to your profession before men. And by these declarations, when compared with so bad a conduct, you will run a great risk of bringing your religious notions themselves into disgrace, and will probably build again that which you seem most solicitous to destroy. Let it therefore evidently appear, that *The grace of God which appears unto all men, has* effectually *taught you* to *deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts*, and to *live soberly*, *righteously*, *and godly in this present world* †. Let the whole world about you see that the divine goodness to you, in which you rejoice and glory, has had its efficacy to purify and humanize your hearts, to fill them with humility and universal love, and to inspire them with a most friendly, benevolent, generous care for the happiness of all around you, as well as with a generous concern *To make your* own *calling and election sure* ‡. Nothing will so powerfully plead for the gospel, as such a care to adorn it, and to seek that *Salvation* which is entirely of grace, *through sanctification of the spirit*, as well as the *belief of the truth* §.

* Gal. ii. 17. † Tit. ii. 11, 12. ‡ 2 Pet. i. 10. § 2 Thess. ii. 13.

CHRIST'S

INVITATION TO THIRSTY SOULS:

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT NORTHAMPTON, IN THE YEAR

1729.

TO THE

REV. MR. JAMES HERVEY.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

It may perhaps surprise you, that amidst the familiarities of our intimate friendship I should, without any previous notice, address you thus publicly from the press. I am not without some apprehension, that your modesty may be a little distressed on the occasion: But I am persuaded, you will on the whole forgive the desire I had, that all, to whom this little piece may come, should know, what most who are personally acquainted with us both already know, that I most highly esteem you, and most affectionately love you; and that no diversity in our professions and forms could prevent our entering into the strictest bonds of friendship, or make me unwilling most openly to profess it, and to perpetuate the memory of it, while this shall remain.

I am sorry to say, the temper that generally prevails is of such a nature, as to prohibit intimacies of this kind, and too frequently to occasion aversions, where there is no other cause of them than a variety of religious sentiments and practices. But it is our happiness, that we apprehend that temper to be as unreasonable, as it is unlovely, And surely all thinking men would see it in the same view, if they would but seriously compare the importance of those things wherein we agree with that of those in which we differ; especially if they would farther reflect, that the very same principles under different views promote, in conscientious men, those different practices, which, forgetting those principles, fundamental as they are to all true religion, the professors of it are so apt to contend about.

You, my pious and honoured friend, being, I doubt not, in your own mind persuaded, that Diocesan Episcopacy is of divine original, and that the church hath authority to decree rites and ceremonies, and to determine controversies in matters of faith, have solemnly declared that belief; and in consequence of it, have obliged yourself to render canonical obedience to those, whom you thereby acknowledge as governing you by an authority delegated from Christ; that thus you may *be subject to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake*, and thereby approve your submission to him. I have declined that subjection, not from any disrespect to the persons of the established ecclesiastical governors, (many of whom I hold in the highest esteem, and number among the most distinguished ornaments of our common christianity) and least of all from any unwillingness to yield subjection, where I apprehend Christ to have appointed it: For so far as I know my own heart, it would be my greatest joy, to bow with all humility to any authority delegated from him. But I will freely tell you and the world, my nonconformity is founded on this, that I assuredly believe the contrary to what the constitution of the church of England requires me to declare, on the above-mentioned heads, and

on some others, to be the truth: And I esteem it much more eligible, to remain under an incapacity of sharing its honours and revenues, than to open my way to a possibility of obtaining them by what would in me, while I have such apprehensions, be undoubtedly an act of prevarication, hypocrisy, and falsehood; reverencing herein the authority of God, and remembering the account I must shortly give up in his presence.

Thus, Sir, on the whole, we both chuse what we apprehend God requires; we both adhere to that discipline, which we believe to have been primitive; or where you give it up in some instances, it is with an upright desire, I doubt not, of conforming to what you judge to be the leading and most important articles: But we both desire, that the communion of the church may be pure, and the form of its discipline and worship truly apostolical; and would exert the power, of which we each of us think ourselves regularly possessed, to make and keep it so; though we do not estimate our respective powers alike. We pray in different words and manners; we preach in different habits; we receive the sacred supper in different postures: But we both preach *repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ,* regeneration and sanctification by his Spirit, and subjection to his laws, and particularly to that distinguishing law of mutual love. We both address the same God, in the name of the same Mediator; and the great blessings we ask, are in the main the same. We both commemorate the death of Christ as our propitiatory sacrifice, resting our own souls, and directing our people to rest theirs, on the atonement he hath made, and the complete righteousness which he hath wrought. Thus joining in love to him as our common Saviour, and *living the life which we live in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God,* we are both *waiting for his salvation;* expecting that ere long our spirits will be joined, in the general assembly and church of those who die in the Lord, (that assembly, where perfect knowledge and love cement in everlasting bands the souls that once differed, as widely as they could differ who were one in Christ;) where we hope, through divine grace, to share ages of delight, till our bodies shall be in the same moment borne from the dust, to inherit in our complete persons the everlasting kingdom of our heavenly Father. And in the mean time, why should it be thought strange, that amidst so many endearing bonds of union, our thoughts are hardly at leisure, to recollect the little circumstances in which we differ? Surely the part we are acting under these different denominations, is far more pleasing to God, more comfortable to ourselves, and more edifying to the world, than if you, dear Sir, were to *set at naught your brother* for his nonconformity, or I to *judge mine* for his conformity; and we were to infect, not to say, poison, the streams of God's sanctuary, where we respectively preside, with the bitterness of contention, censure, and reproach.

I assuredly believe, my worthy brother, that in what I have now been writing with so unusual a freedom, and in what I thought I might in this connection write with some peculiar advantage, I have uttered your sentiments as well as my own. And surely, were they more generally to prevail, the face of our religious interests in Great Britain would wear a more pleasing and more hopeful aspect. Were our hearts thus filled with a desire of approaching to each other, and disposed on one hand and the other to sacrifice, as far as with a safe conscience we could, the circumstances that divide us, where we are divided, love might perhaps find means of union, at present unthought of by most. Or in the mean time, our worshipping in different places under different forms, might be no more pernicious to the peace and prosperity of the church, than our worshipping in different places, according to the same

ritual; which the greatest imaginable uniformity cannot possibly prevent, till we all come to the general assembly, and join the innumerable multitude that surround the throne of the Lamb, in that celestial temple, to which, with all the people of God below, we daily aspire.

To this blessed end, I trust through divine grace, our prayers, our discourses, our writings, and our examples will still be tending; and blessed be God, that there are so many excellent persons in both communions, whose hands and hearts are joining with ours, in the prosecution of it. May their numbers, their zeal, and their charity, be daily growing! And may God establish your health, dear Sir, which is now in so tender a state, that you may long be capable of bearing your important part in so noble a work; that the parish in which you labour, or some other that may afford you a yet larger sphere of usefulness, may be happy to distant years in your edifying sermons, and in those private instructions which you are, with so exemplary, and, Oh! that I could not say, with so uncommon a zeal, adding to those which you address to them from the pulpit! Be assured, Sir, that no man living can more sincerely rejoice in the acceptance of your labours, and particularly in that great and general admiration in which your pious and excellent contemplations are so justly held, by persons of almost every rank and genius, education and profession; so that the warmest friendship can hardly dictate a higher wish relating to them, than that they may be as useful, as they are delightful, to all your readers.

As for the sermon, with which I here present you, it was preached near twenty years ago, and has long lain by me transcribed among several others, which I have prepared for the press, that if surviving friends should desire it, they may be offered to the world after my death. It is now published at the importunate request of a worthy member of the established church, to whom in the intimacy of our friendship it had been communicated, and who has himself been very deeply impressed with the representation of the important truths which are handled in it. My obligations to him, and my regard for his judgment, would not permit me to dispute such a point with him: And I was the more ready to comply with his desire, as something of a peculiar blessing seemed to attend the discourse, when delivered from the pulpit; and that to such a degree, as I do not know to have been equalled by any other sermon I ever preached. This encourages me to hope, that plain as it is, and destitute of almost every charm that might recommend it to a modern taste, the perusal of it may be useful towards promoting the great end of the christian ministry; which undoubtedly is, to bring men to a proper application to that compassionate Saviour whose overflowing goodness is here celebrated, and by that means to lead them to every grace and virtue, as the genuine fruit of faith, and of that love which will naturally be connected with it. I will not call this, the grand secret of reforming the world; for blessed be God, it is not a secret; but it is the mighty instrument, which divine mercy has put into the hands of the ministers of Jesus, to accomplish ends which all the wisdom of ancient and modern philosophers has attempted in vain; and God is to this day *bearing testimony to the word of his grace*. Yes, dear Sir, I will never be ashamed to confess it, that I have the joy to see in your assemblies and in ours, that where these doctrines are faithfully and effectually preached, they rise, like the warm beams of the sun on the face of the earth, benumbed by the rigour of winter, and call forth into verdure, beauty, and fragrancy, a thousand excellent productions, the very seeds of which would otherwise have

perished. Renew, my worthy friend, the ardor of your prayers, that *the God of the Spirits of all flesh* may every where excite a multitude of enlightened and animated witnesses, to these vital truths of his everlasting gospel; and that his blessing may attend every effort for the advancement of this sacred cause. and particularly, that it may, notwithstanding all its imperfections, attend this humble attempt, from the hand of,

Reverend and dear Sir,

Your affectionate brother

in the work of the christian ministry,

and ever faithful friend and servant,

P. DODDRIDGE.

Northampton, Sept. 18, 1748.

CHRIST'S

INVITATION TO THIRSTY SOULS.

John vii. 37.—*In the last Day, that great Day of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any Man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.*

ALL the words of our blessed Redeemer deserve our very serious regard; for, his enemies themselves being judges, *Never man spake as he did* *. But there is something in the words now before us, which may justly challenge a peculiar attention; as they were not spoken in ordinary converse, or to a little circle of domestic friends, but delivered in the temple, with a loud voice, on a solemn day, and in the midst of a very numerous assembly. *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried*, or made proclamation, *saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.*

It is plain from the second verse, that the feast here spoken of is the feast of tabernacles; which was instituted in commemoration of God's giving the law to *Israel*, and conducting them through the wilderness, where they *dwelt in tents* †. The feast lasted eight days: Most of the former of them were spent in tabernacles or arbours made up of branches of the most shady trees, and adorned with the finest flowers and fruits which that delightful country afforded in the month of September. It is not improbable but on all these days the pious worshippers would sometimes quit these pleasant retreats, to attend the services of the temple: But it was the express command of God that *The* whole *eighth day* should be spent there, that being *a holy convocation* ‡, on which, besides other institutions then to be attended, the whole law was to be read over in the audience of all the people, from the original copy which was laid up in the holy of holies §. This was *the last day, that great day of the feast*, which the evangelist mentions in the words before us.

* Ver. 46. † Lev. xxiii. 42, 43. ‡ Lev. xxiii. 36. § Deut. xxxi. 10—30.

The Jewish writers assure us *, that towards the latter end of their commonwealth, they had a peculiar ceremony on this day, to which our Lord may probably here refer. After they had surrounded the altar seven times, with palm branches in their hands, and hosanna's of praise, some of the Levites used to pour out, in the court of the temple, a considerable quantity of water, drawn from the fountain of Siloam; the people in the mean time singing those words of Isaiah, *With joy shall they draw water out of the wells of salvation* †. It is very probable they did this, as a token of their expectation and desire of the Messiah's appearance; who was to *Sprinkle many nations* ‡, to *Pour water on him that was thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground* §.

It was probably during the time of this ceremony, or immediately after it, that our Lord *stood up*, perhaps on some eminence, (as the priest, who made this libation did ‖,) *and cried*, or proclaimed, with a loud and distinct voice, these gracious and important words, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink*, q. d. "You all believe the promises of the Messiah, and you have invented this rite as a token that you expect his coming, and long for the effusion of the Spirit, which is then to be bestowed. Behold in me the person whom you profess so eagerly to expect. *He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath* in effect *said* in many places ¶, (or he who has that faith in me which the scripture requires) *out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*, i. e. he shall receive the communications of the Spirit, in such abundant degrees, as shall not only be refreshing to himself, but shall render him capable of administering, in the freest and most plentiful manner, to the comfort and edification of others. So richly shall he be furnished with its gifts and graces, that spiritual instructions and consolations shall flow from him **, like water from a fountain, which branches itself out into mighty rivers." Thus the evangelist himself teaches us to expound these words, when he says, ver. 39. *This he spake of the Spirit, which they who believed on him should receive.*

* Talm. Tract. Chill. ap Trem. in Loc.

† Isa. xii. 3. ‡ Isa. lii. 15. § Isa. xliii. 3. ‖ Reland. Antiq. Heb. iv. C. 6.

¶ For I do not apprehend with Mr. Whiston that our Lord refers to some passage that is lost.

** *Out of his belly*, i. e. from within—here from the soul. Comp. Job xv. 35. *Their belly*, i. e. mind *prepareth deceit*. Job xx. 20. *He shall not feel quietness in his belly*, i. e. his conscience. Prov. xx. 27. *The candle of the Lord searcheth the inward parts of the belly*, i. e. mind. Ibid. ver. 30. *Stripes cleanse the inward parts of the belly*, i. e. Afflictions may be the means of purifying the soul.

Our Lord speaks of the Spirit here: But we must remember that it is not in an abstracted view, as separate from, but as in conjunction with the other blessings of his gospel, and as preparatory to a state of eternal happiness. And therefore these words in which the blessed Jesus expresseth his ability and readiness to bestow the Spirit, do evidently imply that he is both able and willing to impart all the blessings of this gospel, to all those who do sincerely desire them; and this without any exception. A glorious truth! The epitome of the gospel, and the hope and life of our souls! Which in an humble dependance on divine influences I shall now endeavour to illustrate and confirm. I will

I. Shew you that the springs of the most valuable blessings are in Christ.

II. Prove that he is not as a fountain sealed, but diffuses these streams with a divine freedom, and in the richest abundance, for the relief of every thirsty soul.

III. I shall add some practical reflections.

I. I am to shew you, that the springs of the most valuable blessings are in Christ; so that he is abundantly able to refresh the thirsty soul.

My brethren, I may say in the name of my great Master, as was said to Israel of old, *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it* *. Extend your desires to the utmost boundaries, that are consistent with reason, and piety, and from him you may receive the most copious supply; for he *Is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think* †.

I will not enlarge on the general proof of this fundamental truth, which so often occurs. I will not speak particularly of *The fulness of Godhead* which *dwells in him bodily* ‡; nor of that communicated *Fulness* which is treasured up in him as Man and Mediator, by the *pleasure of the Father* §, of which *we have all received*, even *grace for grace*, i. e. an abundance of grace ‖. I aim, in my present discourse, not so much at enlightening the understanding in the evidence of a doctrine so universally allowed amongst all professing christians; as at affecting your heart, and my own, with a sense of what, even while we acknowledge, we are all so prone to forget.

* Psal. lxxxi. 10. † Eph. iii. 20. ‡ Col. ii. 9.
§ Col. i. 19. ‖ John i. 16.

Let me entreat you then to reflect, on this occasion, what are those blessings which a rational soul would most eagerly desire, most ardently thirst after. You will immediately reply, if you know God and yourselves, "We are guilty creatures, and we need a pardon; so need it, as to be for ever undone without it. We are naturally indigent and dependant, and we need an interest in the constant paternal care of the great Author of our being. We are polluted, weak and disconsolate, and we need the energy of the divine Spirit, to purify, to strengthen, and to revive us. We are immortal creatures, on the borders of the grave, through which we are shortly to enter on the eternal world; and therefore we need, and cannot but earnestly desire an interest in that future and unchangeable happiness." My friends, if this be your judgment, it is according to truth; may these desires be continually growing in your souls! for, be the thirst ever so impatient, the streams which flow from this living fountain are abundantly sufficient to relieve it.

1. Do you thirst for the pardon of sin? From the Lord Jesus Christ you may receive a supply.

Inconsiderable as this may seem to the careless sinner, whose *eyes are sleeping the sleep of death*, to the enlightened soul it cannot but appear of infinite importance. When once convictions take hold of the heart, when the sacred law of the eternal God is thrown open in all its extent and all its purity; and conscience charges us with our violations of it; when that awful hand appears to write *Tekel* against us, *Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting*, no wonder if trembling and astonishment seize us; no wonder if even our *joints* are *loosed, and* our *knees smite one against another* *; when angry Omnipotence appears, as it were, rising against us in all its terrors, and hell seems to open its mouth to devour us. Well may other cares and passions be lost in this, as the rustling of a leaf in the report of thunder. Accordingly the awakened sinner is represented as enquiring, not after a blessing out of the corn-floor and the wine-press, not *saying, what shall I eat, and what shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be cloathed?* but as possessed by other thoughts, which now appear of infinitely greater moment, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God.* He is represented as willing, if possible, to purchase a pardon, not only at the expence of the most costly offerings, *With thousands of rams,*

* Dan. v. 6, 27.

and ten thousands of rivers of oil, were they at his disposal, but with a sacrifice abundantly more precious than these; *Shall I give*, says he, *my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul**. David speaks of himself as thirsting for pardon, when he says, under a sense of guilt, *Whilst I kept silence my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long; For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me, my moisture was turned into the drought of summer*†. It was like an envenomed arrow shot into his soul, the poison of which diffused itself through all his veins, and even drank up the vital spirits.

Now if any of you have felt, or do now feel, this raging thirst, if you experimentally know that restlessness of mind which is the inseparable attendant of such a circumstance, it must be matter of joy to hear that the blessed Jesus can allay these eager desires, can sweetly compose the soul in the midst of these painful agonies, by that *Blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel*‡. We are expressly told, that *In him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of* our *sins*§; that *God hath exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins*‖; and that by him we may be justified, not only from the slighter irregularities of life, but from the greatest enormities of it, even *From all those things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses*¶; for which that dispensation appointed no expiatory sacrifices, but condemned the offender to *Die without mercy***.

2. Do you thirst for the favour of God? Our Lord Jesus Christ is able to introduce you to it.

It is most evident, that this is in its own nature infinitely desirable; and when the *eyes of* a man's *understanding are enlightened*, it will undoubtedly appear so. "And is there," will he immediately cry out, "is there indeed a being of infinite perfection and glory, the overflowing eternal fountain of happiness? And will he communicate of himself to mortal and to sinful creatures? Will he not only sheathe the flaming sword of his vengeance, but extend the golden sceptre of his grace? Will he not only sign the pardon of such ungrateful rebels, but even adopt them into the number of his children? How does my soul long to look upwards, and call him my Father! Happy creatures, whom he admits into such a relation to whom he

* Mic. vi. 6, 7. † Psal. xxxii. 3, 4. ‡ Heb. xii. 24. § Eph. i. 7.
‖ Acts v. 31. ¶ Acts xiii. 39. ** Heb. x. 28.

reveals himself under so endearing a character! Happy creatures indeed, that can go out, and come in, that can lie down, and rise up, under the impression of this glorious transporting thought, God is ever surrounding us with his favourable presence, is ever with us as a father and a friend? Oh that this happiness were mine! How rich should I be in such a portion, though I were stripped of my earthly all, and sent out hungry and hardly bestead, to *seek my bread in desolate places!* Let unthinking wretches *Say, who will shew us any* temporal *good;* but while I have a voice to express, and a soul to form a desire, this shall be its language, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me* !*"

This, my friends, is the tendency of the soul to its proper centre; and as it is of all others the most natural, so in a sanctified heart it is of all others the most forcible and lively. Therefore this kind of desires is represented in scripture, by the most eager and impatient thirst, even that of a hunted deer after refreshing streams: *As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God; My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God† !* And elsewhere, *My soul thirsteth for God: my flesh longeth for thee, as in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is‡:* "The thirsty pilgrim cannot long more for cooling streams, when parched up in a sandy desart, than I for thee." Nay, the ardor of his desire is represented as extorting a passionate cry, *My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God§.*

Do you, my friends, feel any such holy breathings? Can you adopt these pathetic words of David, as expressive of the inward sentiments of your soul? Blessed be God, they are not hopeless desires! The Lord Jesus Christ is the sacred channel, through which the waters of life flow, from the everlasting, inexhaustible fountain! It was the very business which he came into the world about, to establish a friendship between God and his apostate creatures. Therefore we are expressly told, that God *Hath made us accepted in the beloved‖:* And our Lord assures us, that he can introduce us to so great an intimacy with him, that it may properly be said, that he even dwells in our souls: *If any man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him* ¶.

* Psal. iv. 6, 7. † Psal. xlii. 1, 2. ‡ Psal. lxiii. 1. § Psal. lxxxiv. 2.
‖ Eph. i. 6. ¶ John xiv. 23.

3. Do you thirst for the communications of the Spirit? The Lord Jesus Christ can abundantly relieve you.

Are you sensible of those pollutions, which have overspread your souls, and have sullied the original beauties of them? Are you mourning over *A law in your members, which wars against that of your minds** ? Are you complaining of the weakness of your degenerate natures, that when *To will is present with you, how to perform that which is good you find not* † ? Are gloomy apprehensions arising in your minds in consequence of such disorders? Do you tremble under the fears of divine displeasure, already suspecting the safety of your state, or fearing lest you should lose what you have attained? It is evident you need the influences of the Spirit, whose office it is to purify, to invigorate, and to cheer the soul. Now it is from the Lord Jesus Christ that this Spirit is to be communicated, and therefore it is called *The supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ* ‡; and it is said, that *of his fulness we have all received grace for grace*, as I before observed. And for this very reason, because the Spirit was purchased by his blood, is treasured up in his hand, and dispensed by him; all the blessed operations produced by his agency are ascribed to Christ, by whom it is declared that the soul is sanctified, strengthened, and comforted. *Christ of God is made unto us sanctification* §. *I*, says the apostle, *Can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me* ‖. *Our consolations abound through Christ* ¶. It was the more proper and necessary to insist on this, as the text doth so immediately relate to the supplies of the spirit.

4. Do you thirst for the joys and glories of the heavenly world? The Lord Jesus Christ is able to relieve you.

One would think, it were absolutely impossible to believe them, and not ardently to desire a share in them. One would think, that when we have been taking the most transient survey of the land of promise, as delineated in the word of God, we should immediately cry out, as Moses in the views of an earthly Canaan, *I pray thee let me go over, and see that pleasant land, which is beyond Jordan*, even *that goodly mountain, and Lebanon* **. "It is delightful to view it from hence; but "Oh, when shall I enter upon it! When shall I taste those pleasures of which I now hear, and drink of those refreshing streams which shine so beautiful in the distant prospect." *We*, says

* Rom. vii. 23. † Rom. vii. 18. ‡ Phil. i. 19. § 1 Cor. i. 30.
‖ Phil. iv. 13. ¶ 2 Cor. i. 5. ** Deut. iii. 25.

the apostle, *who are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened; not that we may be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life**. And if we are thus thirsting for expected glory, *To whom should we go* but to that Redeemer, who *has the words of eternal life* †. He is the Lord of both worlds, and heaven as well as earth is subject to his command. *All power is given unto him*, both *in heaven and upon earth* ‡. Let him but give forth the sovereign word, and the golden gates, the everlasting doors, shall be lifted up to admit us, and a throne of glory erected, radiant and exalted as he shall ordain. He therefore speaks of it as his peculiar office, and certain care, to prepare seats and abodes of felicity for his people in the invisible world, and at length to translate them thither. *In my Father's house are many mansions: If it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am there you may be also* §.

I hope this may be sufficient to prove, that the Lord Jesus Christ is able to satisfy the most important desires of the soul, and to allay its most eager thirst—for the pardon of sin,—the favour of God,—the communications of the Spirit,—and the happiness of the future state. "It is true," will the humble soul say, "I firmly believe the springs of the most valuable blessings are in him; but have I any encouragement to hope, that he will open them for the relief of so mean, and so unworthy a creature as I?" This is the business of my second general, viz.

II. To prove, that the Lord Jesus is willing to communicate of these living streams with a divine freedom, for the refreshment of every humble soul who sincerely thirsts after them.

Blessed be God, there is a cloud of witnesses to attest a truth in which our hopes for time and for eternity are so nearly concerned. I appeal to the invitations, to the Spirit, to the tears, to the blood of the great Redeemer, and to the experience of every pious soul in heaven and on earth.

1. Let the invitations of Christ witness, that he is ready to relieve thirsty souls.

The gospel-times are described in the prophetic writings, as times of extraordinary plenty, in which the most nourishing and delightful provision should be offered to all, in the most generous and liberal manner. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy wine*

* 2 Cor. v. 4. † John vi. 68. ‡ Mat. xxviii. 18. § John xiv. 2, 3.

*and milk without money, and without price**. And if we look into the history of the Evangelists, we shall see the prophecy accomplished in its fullest extent. For we shall there find our blessed Redeemer publishing the free and unlimited offers of his grace, to all that were willing to accept it. You cannot be strangers to the passages I refer to: *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*†: *Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise*, or on no account whatsoever, *cast out*‡: And in the text it is proclaimed, before the most numerous assembly, on a most public occasion, *if any man thirst let him come unto me and drink*. Can any invitation be more general, more intelligible, more affecting, than these? Hardly should we have imagined it possible, unless we had in some respects seen yet more pathetic declarations than even those I have now recited. Yes, my friends, our Lord Jesus Christ knew the weakness of our minds, and seems to have been aware of a foolish scruple which might possibly arise in them. We might perhaps, have been ready to say, "The blessed Jesus was indeed in a surprising degree tender and compassionate, whilst he dwelt on earth, and was himself surrounded with all the innocent infirmities of our nature: But can we be sure, that he retains the same overflowing tenderness now he is returned to the regions of glory, and surrounded with all the dignity and pleasure of so exalted a station, and all the employments which attend so high an administration?" To obviate even this suspicion, ungrounded as it is, he has been pleased, since his ascension and exaltation, to send us repeated messages of love: and he speaks from the throne of his glory in as condescending and endearing language, as he ever appears to have used in his humblest abasement. And to awaken our attention, and to confirm our faith, he introduces the declaration with a very solemn preface, of which the beloved disciple takes care to give us a particular account. *He said unto me, write*, q. d. Let it be recorded for the instruction and consolation of the remotest ages; *for these words* which I am now about to utter *are true and faithful*, and therefore may be entirely depended upon, as the foundation of the most cheerful confidence. And what are these important words? *And he said, it is done:* The great work is now accomplished, the redemption is complete: *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end*, whose nature and promises are for ever the same; and in consequence of all this, *I will give to him*

* Isa. lv. 1. † Mat. xi. 28. ‡ John vi. 37.

that is athirst, of the fountain of the water of life freely *. To the same purpose are those remarkable words in the next chapter, so near the close of the canon of scripture, *I Jesus have sent mine angel*, or messenger, *to testify these things unto the churches*, as things in which all the churches are most intimately concerned ; and to give the greater weight to them, let it be remembered, *I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star*. And observe, whither so pompous an introduction tends, and where it centres : *The spirit and the bride say, come: And let him that heareth say, come ;* for whoever he be, he may join in proclaiming the invitation : *Let him that is athirst come ; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely* †. My brethren, had our Lord allowed us, as it were, to chuse for ourselves, and to dictate to him in what words he should express himself to us, to silence every doubt, and to banish every fear, I cannot imagine that we could have found any more expressive form of speech than this, *Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely*. And can we suspect, that the Lord of truth and of glory would speak a language foreign to his heart? that he would mock and delude unhappy mortals with insincere proposals, and airy hopes ? That be far from him, and the thought be far from us ! *Hath he spoken, and shall he not do it ? Hath he promised, and shall he not make it good ?* But further,

2. Let the Spirit of Christ witness his readiness to relieve thirsty souls.

I know, there is a great deal of difference between the common operations of the spirit on the minds of those who continue obstinate and impenitent, and those special influences by which he sweetly but powerfully subdues the hearts of those, who are *chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world*. Yet I am persuaded, that none to whom the gospel comes are utterly neglected by that sacred agent. It is observable to this purpose, that Stephen charges it upon the Jews, that *They* and their *fathers had always resisted the Holy Ghost* ‡. Now this charge of *resisting* him plainly supposeth, that he had still been striving with them ; for if there had been no attempt on the one hand, there could have been no resistance on the other. If then the Spirit of God wrought in some degree on all the Jews, throughout every age and period of their state, it seems highly reasonable to believe, that he works on those who enjoy the gospel now ; since this dispensation, with special reference to

* Rev. xxi. 5, 6. † Rev. xxii. 16, 17. ‡ Acts vii. 51.

the extraordinary effusions of the Holy Ghost, is called by the apostle, *The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus**.

For the farther confirmation of this, I question not, but I might appeal to the experience of every one that hears me this day. Surely none of you that are come to years of discretion, have always been unaffected with divine things. Some impressions have been made, some convictions awakened, some purposes formed: And in all these instances God is drawing you, and *the Spirit says, come.* Now, as the Spirit operates under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ, these calls of the Spirit are to be considered, as evidences of that readiness in Christ to bestow the blessings of the gospel, which I am now endeavouring to prove.

3. Let the tears of Christ witness his readiness to relieve those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

If we have not some very inveterate suspicion of a person's insincerity and artifice, we readily believe, that his heart is touched when we see the tears flow from his eyes. Behold then the tears of a Redeemer over perishing souls, and judge by them of the compassions of his heart! You know that celebrated instance, when *He beheld Jerusalem and wept over it*†. Our Lord was then in a triumphant procession, attended by acclamations of the people, who were shouting, *hosanna to the Son of David:* And as for Jerusalem, which he beheld from the mount of olives, it was a city polluted with enormous crimes, and the abode of his most implacable enemies, who were then actually conspiring his murder, which he knew they would in a few days effect. Justly might he have triumphed in that approaching ruin, which he knew a righteous God would bring upon them, for that as well as their other provocations. But behold his compassion! Instead of insulting, *he weeps over* them, and says, *If thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day*, which even yet is continued, *the things that belong to thy peace!—but now they are hid from thine eyes.* The natural broken language of genuine and overflowing sorrow! Surely nothing can be more melting, than such tears, falling from such eyes, and in such circumstances. And if our Lord could not give up the impenitent sinners of Jerusalem without weeping over them, surely he will not despise the humble and penitent soul, who is, perhaps with tears, seeking his favour, and flying to his grace as his only refuge.

4. Let the blood of Christ witness, that he is ready to impart the blessings of his gospel.

The tears of our blessed Redeemer must needs be convinc-

* Rom. viii. 2. † Luke xix. 41, 42.

ing and affecting, if the mind be not sunk into an almost incredible stupidity; but his blood is still more so. View him, my brethren, not only in the previous scenes of his abasement, his descent from heaven, and his abode on earth; but view him on mount Calvary, extended on the cross, torn with thorns, wounded with nails, pierced with a spear; and then say, whether there be not a voice in each of these sacred wounds, which loudly proclaims the tenderness of his heart, and demonstrates, beyond all possibility of dispute or suspicion, his readiness to relieve the distressed soul, that cries to him for the blessings of the gospel. He died to purchase them, not for himself, but for us; and can it be thought he will be unwilling to bestow them? We may well conclude that he *Loved us*, since he shed *his blood* to *wash us from our sins**: For *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*†; *but he hath commended his love towards us*, hath set it off by this illustrious and surprising circumstance, *that while we were* strangers and enemies *he hath died for us*‡.

5. Let the experience of every pious soul, whether on earth or in heaven, witness the readiness of Christ to communicate the blessings of his gospel for the relief of those who thirst for them.

Could we lift up our eyes to the regions of glory, and count all the happy spirits which are arrived there from these abodes of darkness and sorrow, we should find in each of them an everlasting witness and monument of the great truth I am now labouring to assert. Should we behold them in their robes of majesty, with their golden crowns, and their victorious palms, and enquire as the apostle did, *Who are these that are clothed in white robes, and from whence do they come?* The answer would be the same: *These are they who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*§. They have found him both a powerful and a compassionate Saviour, and therefore they are fixed in a state of undecaying felicity. And some of them could confess even the blackest crimes, committed before they were brought to an acquaintance with him; but they were no bars in the way of that grace, which is extended and magnified, even to the chief of sinners.

The experience of the saints in heaven witnesseth this; and the experience of the saints on earth doth as it were echo back their testimony. Would you have living, and visible witnesses? Blessed be God, they are not wanting: I hope, I may add, they

* Rev. i. 5. † John xv. 13. ‡ Rom. v. 8. § Rev. vii. 13, 14.

are not far distant; and with regard to many of you that hear me this day, I hope and trust, that you have the witness within you. I doubt not, but several in this assembly may say, *as we have heard, so have we seen and felt:* Many a one, that may lay his hand on his breast, and cry out in the words of the Psalmist, *This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him from all his trouble**, from that which was incomparably more than all the rest. "Oppressed with a burden of grief and of fear, I threw myself at the feet of a Redeemer, and he gently raised me; he kindly embraced me; he smiled upon my soul, and said, by the voice of his blessed Spirit, *Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.*" What can we oppose to such a cloud of witnesses? Let us cheerfully admit the evidence. Let us joyfully trust the power and the grace of him, who this day renews his compassionate invitation, and says, *and crieth*, as in the text, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.*

III. I conclude with a more particular application.

And here I would address myself,—to those who do not yet thirst after gospel-blessings,—to those who are now thirsting after them—and to those who have already received some refreshment.

1. Let me apply myself to those who do not yet thirst after the blessings of the gospel.

And are there none of that character among you? Are there none in this assembly, who hear me with negligence and coldness, and know in their own conscience that the bent of their desires and pursuits is directed quite another way? My friends, I have a message from God to you; and I would intreat you, that you would suffer your consciences to answer these two questions, plain indeed, but of infinite importance.——Are not the blessings which Christ offers, worth thirsting for?——And is not the time approaching, when, if you persist in your present neglect, you will thirst for them in vain?

Are your souls sunk into so degenerate a taste, and are you so divested of the common reason of men, as not to see, that the blessings proposed are highly excellent, and well worthy the most ardent desire, and the most vigorous pursuit, of every guilty yet immortal creature? Is it not truly desirable, that our guilt should be cancelled, that the displeasure of God should be averted, and his favour secured? And that our souls should be purified, strengthened, and supported by divine consolations, now, until

* Psal. xxxiv. 6.

they are conducted to a state of everlasting happiness? Is it not desirable, that a creature made for a perpetual duration, should have some more stable and permanent happiness than this mortal life?

You know in your own consciences, that these things are truly desirable: And would to God, you would seriously compare them with those vain cares, and those sordid pleasures, for the sake of which you neglect and despise them. How utterly contemptible would those cares and pleasures appear! How unworthy even of a mention or a thought, when brought into such a comparison!

But let me farther enquire, is not the time approaching, when you will thirst for these blessings in vain? You are now insensible of your need of them, and lose yourselves in a variety of amusing dreams, in which you fancy you are possessed of some considerable happiness. But, wretched creatures, in a few years at most, death will awaken you; and then you will know the value of those blessings which you now despise; then you will feel an insatiable thirst after them. Your case will then appear exactly like that described by the prophet, *As when a hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth; but he awaketh, and is not satisfied; or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and behold he drinketh, but he awaketh, and behold he is faint, and his soul hath appetite**. The appetites of your souls after those valuable refreshments will then be excited: but, alas! they will be excited only to torment you. It is a most melancholy case which is represented in the parable, of a poor creature, who, after he had passed his life in the midst of the most overflowing plenty, was at length plunged into a state of indigence and misery, from which *He beheld Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom; and he cried, saying, father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame*†. It seemed a very modest petition; he could hardly have asked a smaller favour than a drop of water; and there seemed something peculiarly mortifying, in receiving it from the finger of Lazarus; and yet you know by the sequel of the story, that even this was denied him. This is the representation, which our Redeemer himself hath given us, of the condition of sinners in the eternal world: And will it not be a dreadful condition to you? Especially when aggravated by those rivers of living water which once surrounded you, and by this gracious proclamation,

* Isa. xxix. 8. † Luke xvi. 23, 24.

so often repeated, and so often despised; *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.*

2. I would address myself to those, who are now thirsting for the blessings of the gospel.

I hope, through grace, there are some such amongst you; some, whose thirst is excited by what hath now been spoken, and are borrowing the words of David, in a sublimer sense than that in which they were originally intended; *Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem* *! Oh that I might taste of those delightful streams, which flow from the rock of ages! To you, my friends, I would briefly say,—Consider the thirst you feel as a token for good,—and be importunate in your addresses to him, who is so able and willing to grant a supply.

You may consider the thirst which you feel as a token for good. The generality of mankind despise these blessings: And why do you desire them? Surely you may consider these desires as of a heavenly original. It is the voice of Christ, that is now speaking; it is the Spirit of Christ that is now pleading with your heart; so that I may say to you, as was said to the blind man in the gospel, who was so earnestly begging a cure, *Be of good comfort, rise, he calleth thee* †. What can therefore remain, but that you should immediately apply yourselves to him. Go directly, and plead the case with him. Prostrate thyself, O humble penitent, prostrate thyself before his throne, and say, "Blessed Jesus, thou that knowest all things, knowest that I thirst after the blessings of thy gospel. Thou seest that I most ardently long for the pardon of sin, the favour of God, the influences of thy Spirit, and the glories of thine heavenly kingdom. I am fully persuaded, that with regard to all these, thou art able to do for me abundantly above all I can ask or think. And wilt thou not relieve me? Wilt thou not *give me to drink?* Wherefore then are thine invitations published in the gospel? Wherefore didst thou proclaim those gracious words, which have been this day so frequently repeated in thine house? Why does thy Spirit even now work upon my heart, and raise there this fervency of desire? Wherefore didst thou weep? Wherefore didst thou bleed? Wherefore didst thou die, if thou hadst no compassion for perishing sinners? But thou hast compassion; thou hast already extended it, to thousands on earth, and millions in heaven. *Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief!* I throw myself

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 15. † Mark x. 49.

at thy feet; nor can I fear I shall perish there, unless infinite power be weakened, and infinite love be exhausted." If but one soul return from the assembly with these sentiments, and these resolutions, all the labours of this day, and many former days, will be abundantly repaid; for that soul will surely be relieved, and God in Christ be glorified and exalted. And now,

3. I would conclude with addressing myself to those who have already tasted these refreshments. With regard to such I would offer the following exhortations.

Be thankful for the refreshments you have already received. Bless God, that such merciful provision is made in the gospel, for the relief and comfort of necessitous creatures; and above all, be thankful, that you have been engaged to seek and to prize it, while so many are as it were dying for thirst, in the midst of these overflowing streams. It is said of Hagar, that when she was almost perishing in the wilderness, *The Lord opened her eyes, and she saw a fountain of water* *. So it is in your case; the Lord hath *opened* your *eyes*, and therefore you have *seen* this *fountain.*

Be solicitous, that others may taste those refreshments which have been imparted to you. It is said of Hagar, in the passage cited above, that when God had discovered this supply, she not only drank herself; but *gave to her child, and he* also *drank.* So should you, my friends, be charitably concerned for the happiness of others as well as for your own. You that are parents should be concerned, that your children may drink; and you that are masters, that your servants may drink; and all, that your friends and neighbours may be refreshed. For, blessed be God, there is no danger of sinking this river by repeated plentiful draughts: Still would it flow on, still would it overflow its borders, though not only we, but all the inhabitants of the earth, should not merely taste it, but live upon it. Which leads me to add,

Continue your application to Christ for farther supplies. We are told, that the miraculous stream which flowed from the rock attended the Israelites in their various removes. *They* still *drank of the rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ* †. Such are the waters that flow from the rock of ages; they do not only refresh the soul on its first conversion, but they afford it daily comfort and support. Be constant therefore in your applications to Christ, and diligent in the use of all appointed means for deriving influences from him.

* Gen. xxi. 19. † 1 Cor. x. 4.

To conclude all, long after the heavenly world, where you shall receive a more abundant supply. The waters which followed Israel through the wilderness, failed when they came into an inhabited land: But this river of life will never forsake the believer; it will flow with him sweetly through the dark valley of the shadow of death, till it spreads itself into wider and deeper streams, in the lovely regions of the heavenly Canaan. Thus are we told, that in the *New Jerusalem* the *river of the water of life proceedeth from the throne of God, and of the Lamb* *. And thus our Lord assures the *Woman of Samaria, whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but it shall be in him as a well of water springing up into everlasting life.* What then remains, but that we each of us cry out, as she did, Lord *give us of this living water, that we may thirst no more, nor come,* as now, to these ordinances *to draw* †: Amen.

* Rev. xxii. 1. † John iv. 14, 15.

AN HYMN.

I.

THE Lord of life exalted stands,
Aloud he cries, and spreads his hands:
He calls ten thousand sinners round,
And sends a voice from every wound.

II.

" Attend, all ye that thirst, draw near,
" And satiate all your wishes here!
" Behold, the living fountain flows
" In streams as various as your woes!

III.

" An ample pardon here I give,
" And bid the sentenc'd rebel live;
" Shew him my Father's smiling face,
" And lodge him in his dear embrace.

IV.

" I purge from sin's detested stain,
" And make the crimson white again;
" Lead to celestial joys, refin'd,
" And lasting as the deathless mind.

V.

" Must I anew my pity prove?
" Witness the words of melting love,
" The gushing tear, the lab'ring breath,
" And all these scars of bleeding death."

VI.

Bless'd Saviour, I can doubt no more;
I hear, and wonder, and adore:
Panting I seek that fountain-head,
Whence waters so divine proceed.

VII.

Clear spring of life! flow on, and roll
With growing swell from pole to pole,
Till flowers and fruits of paradise
Round all thy winding current rise!

VIII.

Still near thy stream may I be found,
Long as I tread this earthly ground!
Cheer with thy wave death's gloomy shade;
Then through the fields of Canaan spread!

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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